

The Garment of Salvation and the Church's Wedding Dress

By Nathan Warner

“Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, You are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering Yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent.” (Psalm 104:1 ESV)

Would you believe that textiles are a \$3,000 trillion dollar industry? It is astounding that so much money is made from our shame – our need to “hide” our nakedness. Of that, the fashion industry makes up an extraordinary \$1.2 trillion globally.

Rudimentary textiles are purely functional, covering nakedness and providing comfort. Fashion, on the other hand, revolves around trends, styles, and ornamentation that bring the wearer added glory, either through artistic ideals of beauty or by association to something seen as important, valuable, or true.

Fashion is not about function – its aim is to bring the wearer prestige and honor, clothing them in human ideas of majesty, nobility, and magnificence. It is about glory.

Perhaps this is why Jesus told us to *“consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these”* (Luke 12:27 NASB). For the lily, “function” and “fashion” are one and the same – innately given to it by God. It is comfortable and content in its natural glory. Solomon’s “glory,” on the other hand, was not innate. It was taxed from nature, stripped by his servants from the glory of God’s creation – fibers and dyes from plants, skins and furs from animals, precious stones and metals from the earth – all to “steal” their glory to add to Solomon.

But this is less about “adding” to glory we have and more about trying to “make up” for the innate glory mankind knows it has lost. It is no accident that the highest fashion of nobles and kings down through the ages sought to make them shine and sparkle with interwoven diamonds and costly threads of brightest colors and hues. It is a human approximation of something we instinctively “know” from the deep past – that we were once innately clothed in glory – the glory of God’s presence. Unlike the Lily, we are missing our natural glory, and we long to be clothed in something infinite, eternal, and divine.

The textile and fashion industries are the world’s oldest business, and they have profited for millennia from the human race’s need to cover its nakedness and regain its glory—to make up for something it no longer has. And while many have argued that human fashion represents the height of materialism, it actually reveals a deep spiritual dilemma – a spiritual deficiency that Man expresses through the material and physical.

STRIPPED OF THE COVERING OF GOD’S PRESENCE

Of course, the origin of clothing was in the Fall of Man into rebellion against God. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were clothed by fellowship with God. The thoughts of their hearts and minds were completely open to God and they felt no spiritual shame because there was no reason to hide their thoughts from Him. They were not open to judgment in the light of His presence, for they had no sin. They were justified to be with Him.

After our fall into rebellion, His light revealed our sin, our inadequacies, our unjustifiable state before Him. And in the presence of God, our ugly spiritual nakedness was exposed: *“Then*

the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings” (Genesis 3:7), “and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8b).

The shame they experienced was in relation to the presence of God. It was a spiritual deficiency. But their response was to try and physically “cover” that spiritual exposure and vulnerability—with dead leaves. In a similar way, many of us have felt “dirty” when we think, or do, something we feel is wrong. We may even wash our hands or shower ourselves to try and cleanse this feeling away. We often act our spiritual problems out in the physical because the spiritual is a very real part of who and what we are.

But this was not enough and Adam and Eve hid from God’s presence. When confronted by the presence of God, Adam confessed, *“I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself”* (Genesis 3:10). Again, he felt the shame because of God. His sin was exposed in the gaze of holiness—he was unjustified to be in God’s presence and his deficiency was obvious to him. God responded, *“Who told you that you were naked?”* (Genesis 3:11a) How could Adam and Eve have felt vulnerable and exposed if they didn’t have a reason to feel shame? The only answer was that they did have a reason to feel shame—they had sinned and become unjustified and unholy: *“Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”* (Genesis 3:11b)

Even in his answer, Adam sought to lay his guilt on Eve and God—perhaps an even greater sin than his rebellion: *“The man said, ‘The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate’”* (Genesis 3:12). And so, as the fallout of our sin became apparent, *“the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them”* (Genesis 3:21). God was teaching them that sin brought death—a terrible consequence, that was not entirely apparent to them yet. And *“the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken”* (Genesis 3:23). Adam would no longer be in the direct presence of God, for the holiness of God cannot clothe what is unholy.

Mankind was plunged into spiritual darkness and exposed to the influence of the devil. Yet, even in this state, Man knows the thoughts of his heart are exposed in the presence of God. He is still naked to God! For *“no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account”* (Hebrews 4:13 ESV).

“CLOTHED” IN SPIRITUAL DARKNESS

It is unbearable to have our unholy state nakedly exposed in the light of God’s Holy presence, so Man seeks to clothe himself in darkness — spiritual confusion, distortions, willing denial of the truth, depraved minds — anything to hide himself from the truth of the presence of the Lord. *“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened”* (Romans 1:21). These are *“those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; who delight in doing evil and rejoice in the perversity of evil; whose paths are crooked And who are devious in their ways”* (Proverbs 2:13-15). But *“woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight!”* (Isai-ah 5:21-22), for *“the way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know over what they stumble”* (Proverbs 4:19).

Darkness is not a “thing” – it is simply the absence of light. You cannot see your own nakedness in the dark, but you also cannot see the dangers around you or the way to safety. Yet this is Man’s “refuge” that he hopes will hide him from God. Unfortunately for him, when God draws near, the darkness vanishes in the glory of His Holy presence: *“If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night,’ Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You”* (Psalm 139:2-3). Spiritual darkness is only a “covering” so long as there is no truth to reveal what is nakedly exposed under its rays.

Sooner or later, everything comes to light. Better to be clothed in the dark so that when the light is turned on you have nothing to be ashamed of: *“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God”* (John 3:19-21).

CHRIST’S GARMENT OF SALVATION FOR OUR NAKEDNESS

You cannot enter into God’s presence unless you are justified to do so. An unjustified heart desires to flee from the light of God! And no man can make himself justified before God. He cannot undo the consequences of his rebellion.

Only one man is justified, righteous, and holy under the light of God’s throne. This is the Son of God – Jesus Christ, Who is God incarnate in human flesh. Jesus came into the darkness of the world to restore mankind’s justification: *“The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a Light dawned”* (Matthew 4:16). He *“was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man”* (John 1:9).

Just as a sinful life brought all Man into sin, a sinless life offered them justification: *“For if by the transgression of the one [Adam], death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men”* (Romans 5:17-18).

This one act of righteousness was Christ’s sacrifice of Himself in our place of guilt and shame. Once accomplished, it was in His power to “gift,” credit, or impute His sinless, justified standing before His Father to us – those who end their rebellion against God and entrust themselves to Him. We are “clothed” in His righteousness and we are no longer so naked and unholy that we cannot approach the throne of God, for He has clothed us in His Holy Spirit so that we can be justified in His presence.

A ROBE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Church is the Bride of Christ, and it is composed of all Believers, each of whom has been betrothed to Christ. Every Believer is clothed in Christ, *“for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”* (Galatians 3:27). When a Bride was betrothed to her husband in Jewish custom, she would immerse, or baptize, herself in a ritual pool of cleansing to signify her washing herself of her former life and her setting herself apart for her

husband. She would then put on fresh garments. I would suggest that this signifies the garment of Salvation, spoken of by Isaiah: *“I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels”* (Isaiah 61:10).

Indeed, the garments of Salvation are the only things that can cover our spiritual nakedness. They are substance and in them we have no need to be ashamed in God’s presence. We walk in this world carrying the light of His presence in us: *“Prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world”* (Philippians 2:15b).

THE CHURCH’S WEDDING GARMENT IS TO GLORIFY CHRIST

God’s work does not end by covering our nakedness with the functional garment of Salvation. He wants us to add beauty to this garment—with a garment of fashion, adorned with our works. He wants us to be devoted to spiritual fashion that reflects the beauty of His ideals—what is important, valuable, and true! This is not adding to our Salvation, for these ornamentations cannot cover our nakedness. They are added as an act of worship to our Beloved through the deeds we do for Him.

Of course, this is all referring to the Jewish bride preparing her wedding garment for the arrival of her husband on their wedding day. One of the chief responsibilities of a betrothed woman in the Jewish marriage custom was to sew and prepare her wedding garment while she waited for her bridegroom to come for her and take her to the marriage supper. The more dedication and care she put into it, the more splendid she would appear for him.

In Heaven, John saw a vision of a wedding in the future when Christ’s *“bride has made herself ready.”* *It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints”* (Revelation 19:7-8). Again, these righteous deeds cannot clothe you with Salvation, for you have already *“clothed yourself with Christ”* (Galatians 3:27b) through the betrothal covenant established in His blood. Rather, these deeds of the Church are ornamentation that pleases Jesus and honors His Father.

These deeds can only be pleasing if they are the fruit of His Holy Spirit in us Who enables us to do the works that please our Bridegroom: *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them”* (Ephesians 2:10). Are you preparing your “wedding garment” to honor His return?

May we *“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”* (Colossians 1:10). *“Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 15:58). Indeed, *“Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve”* (Colossians 3:23-24), *“who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds”* (Titus 2:14). Until He returns for us, may we labor to present ourselves pleasing to Him. Even so, Amen.