

13. Take off the graveclothes

December 30, 2012

When it comes to clothing, we've come a long way since Adam and Eve. Instead of the first couple's "Fig-leaves-for-all-occasions" wardrobe, we have a mind-boggling array of shirts, pants, blouses, skirts, shoes, hats, outer garments, and accessories from which to choose for any conceivable situation, so that ladies can stand in front of their closet full of clothes and say, "I have nothing to wear," with a long sigh.

We have a tendency to classify people by their attire – suits for company executives, politicians, and lawyers; hospital uniforms for doctors and nurses; military fatigues and combat helmet for soldiers; hard hat and workclothes for construction workers; for Lady Gaga and former basketball player weirdo Dennis Rodman, who knows what they would wear just to shock people.

We choose our attire based on our purpose and what we do. The Christian life is no different. When we were unbelievers, we all wore the same kind of spiritual clothes – the graveclothes. With graveclothes, we did what our carnal nature wanted to do – sin.

But after Jesus saved our souls, we were allowed to put on our new clothes that only came from our Savior Jesus Christ. However, we first need to take off our old ones. Unfortunately, all of us must admit that we, still from time to time, look for that old graveclothes to wear because we were comfortable in them, they still entice our sinful nature.

The Word of God was written to be obeyed, and not simply studied. We are to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only as it is written in the Book of James. The fact that we have been called in Christ in Ephesians 1:18 ought to motivate us to walk in unity according to Ephesians 4:1-16. And the fact that we have been raised from the dead according to Ephesians 2:1-10 should motivate us to walk in purity.

We are alive in Christ, not dead in sins. Take off the graveclothes and put on the grace-clothes!

A. THE GRAVECLOTHES

Ephesians 4:17-19 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 (1) having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of (2) the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have (3) given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

Have you ever heard the phrase "Pet sin" that is mentioned by some Bible teachers? Pet sins are sins we purposefully choose to keep around. We keep doing them over and over, even when we know they are wrong. They are the sins we dote on and enjoy, sins we nurture, sins we love, of course, in secret.

Don't think that you are the only one who struggles with your pet sins. Apostle Paul admitted that he, too, struggled with his own sins in the Book of Romans:

Romans 7:14-15 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. NIV

When the apostle said, “the rest of the Gentiles,” he meant that unbelievers of Christ as well as the old, sinful lives his readers in the church of Ephesus had lived before they placed their trust in Christ. Back then, their thoughts were futile – they had no goal, purpose, or consideration of God, just like our old sinful lives. In order to help them and us reject their and our old ways, Paul clearly defined what those ways were like.

1) Having their understanding darkened

The words “understanding” and “ignorance” both point to the mind. Why are our minds so important? Because what we think determines the actions we take, which in turn shapes the path of our lives. Our minds are spiritual battleground, not playground.

As we did before we came to know Jesus as the Savior and Lord, unbelievers have “darkened” their minds by blocking out God’s light which is the Word of God. And they are ignorant of God’s ways, having alienated themselves from the Source of true life. They fall headlong into a pit of spiritual death and consequently they are “excluded from the life of God.”

When apostle Paul penned this letter to the Ephesians two thousand years ago, the Greco-Roman society thought the human mind was the best, noblest, and most worthwhile part of the human being – they even considered it divine. And with geniuses like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to boast of, they took great pride in their intellectual enlightenment. No matter how powerful their intellects were, they lacked spiritual perception, and they floundered in the darkness of this world.

Yes, our current world possesses a great deal of knowledge, but very little wisdom. Unbelievers think that they are enlightened with higher education and the latest information through the latest technologies and, of course, they rejected the Bible as nothing more than a book of fables. But in reality, they are living in the dark. They do not know that satan has darkened their minds because he doesn’t want them to know the truth in Jesus Christ.

2) The blindness of their heart

The Greek word translated ‘blindness’ is “porosis,” which came from poros, meaning “stone.” It usually referred to an especially hard kind of marble and could often mean “petrified.”

This term was also used medically to describe ‘the covering with a callus.’ Applied to the eyes, it meant ‘blindness.’ In this case, applied to the heart, ‘porosis’ emphasized how closed off their hearts were from God.

But the nuance that Paul uses in this verse is not a passive as blindness came upon them unknowingly and unwillingly, rather they chose to be blinded and they chose to be spiritually darkened because they like what they can do in the darkness.

3) Given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness

A dark mind, a dead soul, and a blind heart don’t exactly produce a garden of delights in a person’s life. See the two fruits that come out from that heart and mind – first, lewdness which is sensuality; and second, greediness. Do these two words sum up the mindsets of the 21st Century people around the world, not just America? Yes, they do.

Many politicians and judges don't care what the right things they are supposed to do as long as they can hold onto the power; company executives and union leaders would do anything to get what they want even if it hurts their people and others; entertainment industry people show and gratify sensuality as much as they can, because they know that sensuality sells tickets, CDs, and DVDs; homosexual community insists that the same sex marriage is as normal as the heterosexual marriage and they claim that they were born that way; abortion activists are willing to kill babies in wombs, but they will do anything to save whales and squirrels.

2500 years ago, prophet Jeremiah said this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as the Lord spoke through this lone prophet:

Jeremiah 6:15 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time I punish them, They shall be cast down," says the Lord.

Yes, we are living in the same choking, stinking moral and spiritual cesspool as they were. Christ has pulled us out of the muck, cleaned us, and given us new, beautiful garments of Grace to wear.

B. THE GRACE CLOTHES

Ephesians 4:20-24 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

To "learn Christ" means to have a personal relationship to Christ so that you get to know Him better each day. This fellowship is mainly based on the Word of God. Through the Bible, we hear His voice to our spiritual ears; through the Bible, the Holy Spirit is our personal Tutor.

We can be taught "the truth" as it is in Jesus Christ. The better we understand the Word of God, the better we know the Son of God, because the whole Bible is a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The unsaved man is spiritually ignorant, while the Christian is intelligent in the things of the Word; the unsaved man does not know Christ, while the believer grows in his personal knowledge of Christ day by day. We have believed the truth; we have received the life; in turn, we will walk "in the way" and not walk after the example of the unsaved world.

Ephesians 4:22-24 is a summary of Romans 5-8, where Paul explained the believer's identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. The old man, our ungodly lifestyle before Christ has been put away, and we can now walk in newness of life through Christ.

As Christians, we have not simply changed our minds. We have totally changed our citizenship. We belong to God's "new creation" in Christ. That means that the ideas and desires of the old creation no longer should control our lives.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

The simplest illustration of this great truth is given in John 11, the resuscitation of Lazarus. Our Lord's friend, Lazarus, had been in the grave four days when Jesus and His disciples arrived at Bethany, and even Martha admitted that, by now, the decaying body would smell. But Jesus spoke the word and Lazarus came forth alive. Notice our Lord's next words:

John 11:44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

Lazarus no longer belonged to the old dominion of death, because he was now alive.

"Why go about wearing graveclothes? Take off the old and put on the new!"

This was Paul's argument – we no longer belong to the old corruption of sin; we belong to the new creation in Christ.

How do we do this? The answer is in v23 – Renewing our mind. Conversion which is justification by the blood of Jesus Christ is one time, but living as a godly Christian which is sanctification is a daily process. The Word of God renews the mind as we surrender our all to Him daily.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

As the mind understands the truth of God's Word, it is gradually transformed by the Holy Spirit, and this renewal leads to a changed life. Physically, we are what we do, but spiritually, you are what you think. This is why it is important for us as Christians to spend time daily meditating on the Word, praying, and fellowshiping with Christ.

C. DO YOU STILL HOLD ONTO YOUR GRAVECLOTHES?

Do you still hold onto your graveclothes because your carnal desires still are happy in it? Do you still hide your pet sins where no one can see but bring them out when no one is around? Only you know what they are. Oh, I take it back. God knows it all too well, because He sees the most secret part of your heart. Doh!!!

In light of the New Year coming up in a couple of days, you have to have a New Year's resolution, right? How about this one?

Take off that graveclothes permanently. Actually, burn that sucker. While you are at it, burn that bridge, too. You have no reason to go back, because you are new creation in Christ Jesus. Put on the Grace -clothes.