The Wedding Garment: Putting Off the Old Man and Putting On Christ

Let us think about the wedding garment that the Lord Jesus speaks of in one of His parables. It is the garment without which a man cannot remain at the King's feast. Before we come to it, we ought to see how God makes His call and who bears responsibility for it.

We went out to preach the Gospel. Someone asked me what had happened, where we had been and what we had done, and I told him briefly about this work. This man said to me that if people turned to God and this could be seen, then we had done God's work, and if they did not turn, we had not. So the question arises: are we answerable for those who accept or do not accept the call?

The parable of the marriage of the king's son gives us the answer. In it we also find the man who came into the feast without the proper garment.

Let us turn to Matthew 22:1-14. The Lord Jesus spoke to them again in parables and said: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son. He sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, with this command: 'Tell them which are bidden: "Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage."' But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise. And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. When the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants: 'The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.' So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. 'Friend,' he said unto him, 'how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants: 'Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

The Servants Are Not Rebuked

In the parable, the king does not rebuke the servants because the people did not come to the wedding. He was angry with those who were bidden and would not come, not with the servants who went to call them. He then sent those same servants out into the highways, to call to the wedding all whom they would find.

That is what we have done as well: we went out into the highways and called everyone. We do not know who will accept the call. We are not answerable for those who accept it or do not accept it. But we are answerable if we do not go. The Lord calls us to go, and we must go and sow.

The Man Without a Wedding Garment

Verses 11 and 12 concern us in a special way: "And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. 'Friend,' he said unto him, 'how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?'" That man was speechless and was cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The Lord Jesus uses these words about weeping and gnashing of teeth several times. They point to the place that the Word of God calls eternal hell, Gehenna or everlasting punishment. This man had also come into the wedding and believed he was welcome there, but he was not clothed in the garment he ought to have had.

At people's weddings, the guests dress in a special way. They buy or have clothes made especially for that wedding. We do not know whether this custom comes from the Bible. But we want to examine what the garment we must wear is made of. It was not only the man in the parable who had to have it; we must have it too. When we enter the wedding chamber, we must be found clothed in it. We shall see in several places in Scripture that we must put off the garment we have and put on another.

First We Put Off

God teaches us that we must first put off and only then put on. We cannot put the new garment on over dirty clothes. You have never seen anyone come to a wedding with their best clothes pulled on over the ones they wore to feed the pigs. A person washes, cleans himself, puts on scent and then puts on his wedding clothes. He does not pull his good clothes on over the bad ones. That is what we must do as well.

In Romans 13:12-14, the apostle Paul writes: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

Verse 12 speaks to us of putting off and putting on: let us cast off the works of darkness. What was that man clothed in, in the wedding chamber? The works of darkness, the flesh, were his garment. The apostle tells us to put on the armour of light, to walk honestly and to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not merely a metaphor, but a real thing that we must do.

We find the same exhortation in Ephesians 4:20-24: “But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful

lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

What, then, was that man clothed in, in the wedding chamber? He was clothed in the old man. What kind of clothing the old man has is shown to us by the apostle Paul in Colossians 3, where he writes about the same things as in Ephesians. When he says "mortify", we can also understand "put off". Colossians 3:5-8: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth."

The apostle continues in verses 9 and 10: "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." "Ye have put off": here the verb is in the past tense. In Ephesians we read "that ye put off", as of something yet to be done. In Romans 13:14, the exhortation "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" is a continuous present. In Galatians we shall again find the past tense: "have put on Christ".

Can we put on Christ over the old clothing? No. We must put it off. We put off the old man and put on the new man, and this is something we must do. Many say that the garment is already there, hanging on a peg in the entrance hall, and that the man in question, when he walked past it, did not realise he was supposed to put it on. But if the Lord finds us clothed in the old man, do we have any chance left?

Let us remember: we are called to put on the new man, made after the image of Him that created him. Our clothing is the new man. On one side stands the old man, the old clothing, and on the other, the new man. What this clothing means we see in Galatians 3:26-27: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." We have put on Christ, that is, we have put on the new man, just as the Word of God tells us.

You Have a Name That You Live

What these garments look like is revealed to us in the book of Revelation, and then we shall return to Ephesians to see what we must put on. In Revelation 3:1-5 we read: "And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before my God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."

‘Thou hast a name that thou livest’ means, we might say, that you bear the name of someone wearing a wedding garment, but in fact you are clothed in the old garment and you are dead. Once again Scripture speaks to us about garments, this time about white garments. Some maintain that this white clothing is Christ’s and that it is attributed to us as well, so that on the outside we are white, even though underneath we are dirty, black, clothed in the old garment. But must we put off the old garment? We must. In Ezekiel, the Lord says that He passed by His people, found them naked, covered their nakedness and clothed them.

Also in Revelation 3, in verses 15-18, these white garments are spoken of: ‘I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.’

Here is another category of people: those who think all is well with them, that they are in a state pleasing to God and that they lack nothing. In reality they are blind, miserable, poor and naked; that is, they do not have this clothing. The Lord counsels them to buy white garments from Him, so that they may be clothed with them and the shame of their nakedness may not appear. If we stop at these verses alone, we do not realise what it means to buy garments from the Lord Jesus. But the Lord calls us to clothe ourselves, and what this means we shall see further on.

Let us not take the Word of God lightly, believing that the garments are hanging somewhere on a peg and are handed to us merely to cover our sinful state. God does no such thing. First He requires us to put off, so that we can put on, as Romans 13:12 says: “The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.” (Romans 13:12) This is the first step towards the white garments.

Let us leave off lying, fornication, hatred and malice. The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 4:25 In the same place, in verse 31, he adds: ‘Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.’ This is our putting off.

Some only put off

Yet it is not enough to put off, because some people only put off and never put on. Concerning the souls under the altar, Revelation 6:11 says: ‘And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.’ They were given a white robe, something similar to what we saw in Revelation 3. This garment is a kind of gift, but we shall see that we too must work with God’s gift. That is why we are called to clothe ourselves with the white garment.

Revelation 19:7-8 shows us more clearly what the clothing of the Lamb’s wife means, and these words fill us with joy: ‘Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the

Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. 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.) With what, then, do we clothe ourselves? With righteous deeds. In Revelation 3, the Lord tells the church in Sardis that He has not found her works perfect before God. It is as though He were saying to her: 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead, and I have nothing to clothe you with.' When the wedding comes, the wife must have made herself ready and must be found clothed, not unclothed.

Ezekiel 16 gives us a beautiful illustration of what God does when He clothes. After that we must also see how we clothe ourselves. Some leave everything to God: His part, they suppose, is to clothe us, and ours is merely to ask for His mercy. But we shall see that, besides putting off, we must also put on. In Ezekiel 16:8-13, the Lord says to Jerusalem: 'Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I throughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom.'

We can see in these words an illustration of ourselves: "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Ephesians 4:24) urges us 'that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness'. This is no ordinary clothing, but something very special. This is the Lamb's wife: she has made herself ready, and God has clothed her most beautifully.

Put on the armour of light

Romans 13 tells us that we must cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Ephesians 6:11 shows us what the armour of light is: 'Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.' Whose is the armour of light? Who is the light? The Lord Jesus says of Himself in John 8:12: "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." And in Galatians 3:27 we read: 'For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.' We belong to Christ.

Why must we put on the armour of God? Without the armour of light we shall not be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. His concern is not to clothe us, but to soil us and to throw filth over us. In Zechariah 3 it is said of Joshua the high priest that he stood before the Lord clothed with filthy garments, and Satan stood at his right hand to accuse him, that is, to put still more filth on his garments. This is Satan's work: he schemes to clothe us with the old man, so that we may be found that way.

Paul continues in Ephesians 6:12: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” It is a battle, and in order to fight it we must cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. That is why verse 13 says: ‘Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.’ Instead of ‘take unto you’, we could just as well say: ‘Put on the whole armour of God.’

What is the purpose of this clothing of light? It is given to us so that we may overcome: so that we may withstand in the evil day and remain standing after we have overcome everything. Let us now look at each part of the armour in turn, so that we may understand it better.

Girded with truth

In Ephesians 6:14, Paul writes: ‘Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.’ First we must have the girdle of truth about our waist. Here truth is the opposite of lying: we are to walk in truth and no longer live in falsehood.

Today people lie very easily. We slip in just a little untruth, we sweeten things a bit, we change the meaning of the words only slightly, so that they no longer sound the same. And we reassure ourselves by saying that there is still some truth in it, since we only twisted it a little. But we must be girded with truth. The man without a wedding garment, who was speechless, was not girded with truth.

Then we must put on the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness belongs to the Kingdom of God. We may call it uprightness, spotless purity, a life without sin and without the slightest trace of unrighteousness. That is what God is like, and we must put on His whole armour, the armour of light.

But it is not enough to have our loins girt about with truth and to have on the breastplate of righteousness. Verse 15 adds: “and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” What does this mean? Not long ago we carried out a work of proclaiming the gospel, and we rejoiced in it. Yet there are people who scorn it and say that this is not how it should be done, but some other way. They do nothing themselves, but they know that “this is not how it should be done”. We must have our feet shod with this preparation, just as soldiers are shod with boots. In war, as you march, you may tread on harmful things too.

The Shield of Faith Against the Darts

Verse 16 continues: “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” Once we are clothed with all of these, we are given a further weapon. Someone criticised me for this work, the one with the billboards. That man said that it would have been better to give the money to the poor. That remark is found in the Bible too.

We need the shield of faith so that we do not fall when someone comes to strike at the foundation. This attack has a purpose: to stop you, to tell you that you are not doing what you should and that nothing is right, so as to discourage you. That is precisely why we are given the

shield, so that we can quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And the wicked one comes through people.

We must remain in the faith. Did we do all that we should have done? Perhaps what we did was poor and we could have done better. Perhaps, by God's reckoning, it is little. But what depended on us, we did. Perhaps we even went beyond our human strength and made mistakes, but we did it. That is why we must be clothed with these weapons.

No One Can Pluck Us Away

Verse 17 says: "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The helmet of salvation is the hope of salvation. It sits on the head, and the attack comes precisely there, at the head.

Do we have this hope of salvation? How could we not have it? The Lord Jesus said in John 10:28: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." No one. An evil heart of unbelief remains a danger. But if we remain in obedience, no one will pluck us away, not even Satan. This is the great blessing of the helmet of salvation: no one can pluck us out of the hand of the Lord Jesus.

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. If we walk according to the Word of God, we have the assurance that the Spirit of God is guiding us. He guides us when we walk according to the Word, not when we turn aside from it. And walking after the things of the Spirit, as Paul says in Romans 8:6, is life and peace.

In verse 18, Paul adds: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." These are the things with which we must clothe ourselves at the beginning, so that we can come to the true clothing. They are weapons, the armour of light. They are not, however, the actual clothing with which we shall be clothed there.

The final clothing we find in Colossians, chapter 3. The Lord Jesus has this clothing too, and we shall have the same clothing as He has, because He is the Husband and we are the wife, the bride. It is a great encouragement for us to understand the Word of God and to put it into practice.

The preceding verses speak of putting off, and verse 10 says: "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." What it means to be clothed in Christ is shown to us in verse 12: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering."

Did the man without a wedding garment have a heart full of mercy? He did not. And it is indeed hard to come to a heart full of mercy.

God is full of mercy, and He goes before us. If He were not full of mercy, how could we be? That is why it would be good for us to understand what it means to be full of mercy. We are called to

clothe ourselves with a heart full of mercy, with kindness, with humbleness of mind, with meekness and with longsuffering.

These qualities are part of the fruit of the Spirit. To be clothed according to Colossians 3 therefore means to be clothed with the fruit of the Spirit. This is exactly what the man without a wedding garment lacked: the fruit of the Spirit was not in him.

The apostle continues in verses 13 and 14: “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.” We are all called to put on the new man, created after the image of God. This is the wedding garment.

You Prepare Your Garment Beforehand

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul shows that the Spirit of God changes our garment and renews us. He clothes us from glory to glory, after the image of God, until we all bear His image.

Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that the clothing will only be given to us then, that we shall be transformed after we die. Some say that then we shall be given the glorious body, that then we shall be made perfect and clothed, and that this will be the garment in which we shall stand at the wedding. But if you do not have the garment on you, you have nowhere to get it from. Each one has his own garment, there are no spare garments, and you prepare your garment beforehand. Of the Lamb’s wife, Scripture says that she has made herself ready.

The passage in 2 Corinthians 5 shows us this and encourages us. In verses 1–3 we read: “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.”

Let us pay attention to the condition set here: we shall receive the heavenly house if we are found clothed, not naked. Verse 4 continues: “For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.”

Let us understand, then, that we must put off the old man and put on the new man, created after the image of God. This is how we come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, that is, to the clothing that the Lord Jesus has.

May the Lord help us.

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