

## ***Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible***

### ***The Prodigal's New Clothes***

Lesson #10 for June 4, 2011

Scriptures: Genesis 4:1-8; 25:25-34; Luke 15:4-32; John 11:9, 10; Romans 5:12-20.

1. All of us know stories about rebellious teenagers. How many of us have been one? We do not know if the younger son in this story was still in his teens or perhaps in his 20s or 30s. As a physician I have had patients with all kinds of stresses and physical symptoms who finally confessed to me that if I would just take their teenagers and deal with them, they would be just fine!
2. Was Mark Twain's story a little bit like that of the prodigal son? He is reported to have said at the age of 27 that he could not believe how much his father had learned in the last 10 years!
3. It is hard to explain why two children raised in the same family can turn out so differently. Look at Cain and Abel. (Genesis 4:1-8) And what about Esau and Jacob? (Genesis 25:25-34) And consider Lucifer and one-third of God's children contrasted with the faithful angels. (Revelation 12:1-3) In our story for this week, the older son appeared to be loyal, persevering, and industrious. The younger son appeared to be rebellious against every kind of restraint. What caused the difference? The obvious and immediate answer might be free will. But, why did they choose to go such different ways? Is a younger brother treated differently than an older brother?
4. One wonders how many Jewish fathers of Jesus's day would have been willing to divide their property and allow the younger son to take his portion while the father was still alive and healthy. From the story we do not know how precise they were in the division. The normal Jewish custom was to give the oldest son a double portion because he was required to care for his parents in their old age. Do we then imply that this younger son got one third of the estate? Did the girls—if there were any in the family—get any of the inheritance? No, because it was assumed that they would marry and become a part of their husband's heritage or inheritance. But, if there were no sons, then the daughters would share the inheritance. (Numbers 27:8; Numbers 36:6-9)
5. Did the older brother have anything to say to his younger brother before he left? Or, did he perhaps even refuse to speak to him? What did the father say to his younger son? Did he plead with him? Did he ask him to think it over for a while? Was he very reluctant or was he not so reluctant to give the younger son his portion? What did the neighbors think about the family? What do you think the father said to his son as he was leaving? Did he ask where he was going? Did he ask what his plans were? What did his mom say?
6. All of us make choices every day. Probably, only a few of those choices are truly free. Have you made some choices that resulted in bad consequences?
7. Did the father ever discuss the condition of his younger son while he was away? Did he make any attempt to contact him or find out how he was doing? Did the younger son make any attempt to inform the family about how he was doing? Did the father have a pretty good idea of what the older brother's attitude toward his younger brother was? Or, was he surprised at the older brother's response?
8. Do you think the younger son made any attempt to establish himself and think about his future during the "good days"? Or, did he just foolishly spend his money without

considering what he would do in the future? Why is it that so few children seem to appreciate the business that their parents own or manage. Often, it seems that the children have to leave the business for a while before they realize how fortunate they really were. There is a parable told in the “wine country” that suggests that the first generation earns it, the second generation spends it, and the third generation loses it.

9. Not every young son who leaves home in a state of rebellion does poorly. What if the prodigal had done well? Did he think about his father during those days?
10. As we know, his circumstances turned for the worse. Was he sorry for his rebelliousness and sin of leaving home? Or, was he only sorry because of the consequences?
11. What does the son’s speech prepared for his father tell us about his repentance?
12. Look at the context of these three parables told back-to-back in Luke 15. The lost sheep knew it was in trouble but had no way of getting home. Of course, the lost coin knew nothing. The lost son knew he was in trouble, but he also knew the way home. To whom were these parables told? They were told to the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And, why were these parables told to them? Because they despised the poor and the outcasts. The father gave the younger son one third of his property because the son asked. Don’t you think that if the older brother had asked for virtually anything to celebrate with his friends, the father would have given it to him?
13. How does God feel about every one of His children who leave Him? How does God feel about those who have been in the truth and then turned away from it? (Hebrews 6:4-6) Martin Luther rejected the book of Hebrews partially because of these comments in Hebrews 6. How do you understand this passage? That passage in Hebrews 6 refers to those who are continuing to crucify Christ, etc. They are not trying to come back to God. They do not even want to come back. They are busy doing their own thing.
14. What are the most common reasons why people reject the religion of their childhood? Is it because it has been misrepresented to them by their parents? How do you understand Solomon’s comment in Proverbs 22:6? In the story of the prodigal son, was the father an enabler of his son’s problems? Some people like to interpret this parable to suggest that everyone will be saved!
15. When things became difficult for the younger brother in the far country, how many times did he try to find other jobs before accepting a position taking care of pigs? Was that really the best job he could find? Where were all of his fair-weather friends? We have no idea how far the young man had gone away from home. Perhaps, the owner of the pigs may have known his family or at least known of them. Is that why he gave him a job even feeding pigs?
16. The real point of this parable is what happened when the young man began to reflect on his circumstances. Try to reconstruct in your own mind the thought processes that he went through. When he considered returning home, did he have some idea of what response he would get from his father? What about the response he would get from his older brother? Did he have a good idea what the older brother might say when he came home?
17. There is no evidence that the father had sent out a search party to find him or in any way tried to convince the young man to return home. Didn’t God allow Lucifer to rebel right in heaven! Adam and Eve were allowed the freedom to rebel in the Garden of Eden. The consequences have affected all of us. (Romans 5:12-21)

18. When the young man finally decided to go home, notice what happened. He was obviously not in good shape. But, the father who had been looking for him for a long time saw him a great way off. He did not want his son to be seen even by the servants in his deteriorated condition. He rushed out to his son and threw his mantle around him, “fell on him,” and kissed him. When the young man began to make his confession, the father would hear none of it. The son had come home, and that was all that mattered. When they reached the house, the father told the servants to bring the best robe and place it on the son. No doubt, he was allowed to get cleaned up while they prepared for the celebration.
19. If this is a parable about God’s response to sinners who come back to Him, what does this part of the story imply? Is this an accurate representation of how God the Father feels about His children—even His sinful children? (See Galatians 3:28) Does the Father have any trouble with His forgiveness? The son had turned from his evil ways, confessed, and repented. In the eyes of the father, that was enough. There is no evidence that the father said to his son, “How did you get yourself into such a mess?” Or, “I told you so!”
20. Which groups were represented by the different individuals in this parable? Who was Jesus talking about when He spoke about the younger brother? Who was He talking about when He spoke of the older brother?
21. Did the younger son come home just because the consequences had become so bad? At what point in his experience, did the young man begin to think of himself as a servant instead of a son?
22. What steps does a sinner usually need to go through before he comes back to the Father in true repentance and humiliation? Is a change in our attitude essential to the process of salvation? Absolutely!
23. Do you think this parable was intentionally told to represent God’s character and His attitude toward sinners? Which of the following comes closest to your attitude toward God the Father and how He runs His government?
- 1) The God who walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.
  - 2) The God who drowned all but eight in the flood.
  - 3) The God who descended in smoke and flame and shook Mount Sinai.
  - 4) The God pictured in Hosea 11 who pleaded with the children of Israel to come back again. (Compare Hosea 4:17)
  - 5) The God who sat on the hillsides of Galilee and preached the Sermon on the Mount.
- Could you write out in a few words a description of the God you believe in? Do we need to include all of these experiences in our understanding of God’s character? Could you find a way to include all these sides of God’s character in your description? Are all of these descriptions of the emergency measures God has taken and the great lengths to which God is willing to go to win His children back to trust Him?
24. For those of us who believe in the great-controversy, trust, healing model of the plan of salvation, every story in the Bible is primarily about God. In fact, the stories are better evidence than the “claims”—which are sometimes called key texts—because the stories give us evidence. Why do you think Jesus told this story? Was it a true story? Why didn’t Jesus tell us what happened later?
- Dr. A. Graham Maxwell has put it like this in the section “Another Look at God” which is just before the epilogue in his book, *Servants or Friends?*

*I believe that the most important of all Christian beliefs is the one that brings joy and assurance to God's friends everywhere [throughout the universe]—the truth about our heavenly Father that was confirmed at such cost by the life and death of his Son.*

*God is not the kind of person his enemies have made him out to be—arbitrary, unforgiving and severe. [Can you think of a common Christian belief that sounds arbitrary or severe? Does the doctrine of eternally burning hell qualify as being severe?] God is just as loving and trustworthy as his Son, just as willing to forgive and heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious Person who values nothing higher than the freedom, dignity, and individuality of his intelligent creatures—that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey, may be freely given. He even prefers to regard us not as servants but as friends. This is the truth revealed through all the books of Scripture. This is the everlasting Good News that wins the trust and admiration of God's loyal children throughout the universe.*

*Like Abraham and Moses—the ones God spoke of as his trusted friends—God's friends today want to speak well and truly of our heavenly Father. They covet as the highest of all commendations the words of God about Job: "He has said of me what is right." [Job 42:7,8] (Note that content inside brackets is added.)*

25. God has been accused of just about every evil that we can imagine. Satan has pictured Him as a tyrant who is arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. Unfortunately, many of these pictures have been taken up and taught by Christian groups down through the years!
26. If this story of the prodigal son happened in our day, would the people of your church group react more like the Father or more like the older brother when the prodigal came home?
27. For those who are still out there in the world and not at all sure that they want to come back, is there any way that we can encourage them to come home again? If we were a little more like the father and less like the older brother, would people be more attracted?

**© 2011, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials, and we might even want to share good ideas with others. So, let us know.**

[Info@theox.org](mailto:Info@theox.org)

Last Modified: April 30, 2011

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSTG-Hart\GarGrace\SS-10-GarGrace-2011\_06\_04-2011\_04\_12-Fin+.wpd