

Are We Donning Dirty Diapers or a Robe of Righteousness?

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Wearing Diapers

Have you ever been seated next to a person holding an infant child when suddenly you noted that the air reeked with an atrociously offensive odor? The person holding the child smiles, tapping the youngster's head and sweetly says, "Time for a change." The stench arising from that dirty diaper may give you some idea of what our futile attempts to please God and gain salvation through good works smell like to a holy and just God. He has declared through His prophet Isaiah that *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.* (Isaiah 64:12) We humans became unclean at the moment of our conception. David has assured us of that fact, as have Paul and Moses. *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.* (David in Psalm 51:5) We call that original sin and there is not a person who ever lived (apart from Christ) who can claim freedom from that innate sin. The apostle Paul wrote that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23) and Moses confirmed the fact; *The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.* (Genesis 6:5) That was prior to the flood. Then we read, *Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood.* (Genesis 8:21) That divine statement followed the flood when only eight souls remained alive on earth. The only things that had changed were material in nature. The immaterial soul of man remained a perpetual repository for sin.

You may recall that Adam and Eve were the first humans to try covering their sinful shame via the futile act of sewing fig leaves together to cover their private parts; just a pair of leafy, Edenic walking shorts. Today, people are engaged in the same kinds of vain attempts to cover their shame. Those good works are colloquially referred to as "fig leaves." Sin does not always exhibit shame but instead it manifests as guilt, low self esteem, the need for praise from others, despicable acts, etc. The good works come in many forms, all virtuous from a social perspective but none sufficient to gain God's acceptance and salvation. That comes in only one way specific and Paul tells us that as well. *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9) Fig leaves don't save us!

Many false religious systems are built on a framework of faith plus works. True Christianity is built upon faith plus nothing. As the apostle Paul reminds us, *Now when a man **works**, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.* (Romans 4:4) If our eternal life is an obligation which God has to satisfy because He owes us something, how much work would you and I have to do in order to earn that payout? What level of wage, remuneration or take-home pay has God revealed to us in His Word that we need to meet in order to gain eternal life? According to the way I interpret this next portion of Scripture, the level of that particular salary or stipend is zip, zero, zilch or nada. On the other hand our eternal stipend for sin is enormous. *For the wages of sin is death, but the **gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 6:23) As I understand that passage, eternal life is a gift, a donation, a present or a bequest. What amount did you pay for any gift you received for your last birthday or Christmas 2007? If you paid anything at all it was not really a gift.

When we combine a variety of verses from the several letters written by the apostle Paul we are impressed with the enormity of that benevolent truth. Grace is the unmeritable favor of God. To the church at Ephesus he wrote, *For it is **by grace** you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the **gift of God**— not by works, so that no one can boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9) As though he were continuing the thought he also wrote this to the Christians in Rome, *And if **by grace**, then it is no longer by **works**; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.* (Romans 11:6)

To the Galatians' church that was adding a whole list of dos and don'ts (legalism) to the gospel of salvation, even for those who had already been saved, Paul wrote this, *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the **grace** of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.* (Galatians 1:6-7) In writing to the legalists in Colossi Paul teaches them, and us: *Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom,*

with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. (Colossians 2:16-17, 20-23)

We still see today that ill-informed or uninformed people either try to become saved through good works (those stinking, excrement laden and urine soaked, dirty diapers) or they attempt to gain more favor with God after they are saved by placing non-biblical restrictions on themselves and other Christians. Paul says that is not good news (*really no gospel at all*). As we will learn in the section below concerning the robe of righteousness, we cannot add to the view that God has of us once we don that garment of salvation. You cannot improve on perfect and that is exactly how He sees us.

A Robe of Righteousness

Martin Luther (November 10, 1483 – February 18, 1546) was the father of the Protestant Reformation, an event that markedly changed the course of Western civilization. Luther, who was formerly a Roman Catholic monk, had been constantly seeking God's approval through countless trips to the confessional booth (often during the same day), repeatedly traversing through the Roman Catholic tradition called "Stations of the Cross" and performing other acts of indulgence to allegedly pay for his sins and please God. Then one evening, while preparing a lecture on Romans for his theology class, he was suddenly enlightened to the truth of the following passage of Scripture; *For in the gospel righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."* (Romans 1:17-emphasis added) It has been said that the entire Reformation pivoted on that single verse. Put another way it was the "hinge" that opened the door of truth to vast numbers of people. When Luther finally saw the truth, when he saw through the cloud of his own natural, fallen humanism and **the veil** of unbelief was finally lifted, he could agree with Paul's message to the Corinthian church; *But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord*

*is, **there is freedom**. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* (2 Corinthians 3:16-17) The "freedom" of which the apostle wrote is the realization that our right standing before God (righteousness) is not based on faith plus works, but faith plus nothing at all. The act of being *transformed into his likeness* involves another phase of our Christian experience (progressive sanctification) that will be explained below. But now we need to learn more about this

righteousness from God of which Paul has written.

The prophet Isaiah experienced it and the freedom it brings. He wrote, *I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a **robe of righteousness**, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.* (Isaiah 61:10) Prior to understanding imputed righteousness, Martin Luther did not *delight greatly in the LORD*, nor could he say that his *soul rejoices in my God*, as did Isaiah. On the contrary Luther fully admitted that he was utterly frustrated concerning his relationship with the God who seemed to demand so much from him and afforded him so little peace. The reason for that lack of peace was Martin's spiritual bondage; he was not free in Christ. He did not know the truth about imputed and he was trying to earn righteousness on his own; an impossible task indeed. Jesus taught us that knowing Him personally and learning about His finished work on our behalf is a freeing experience. He said, *Then you will know the **truth**, and the **truth** will set you free.* (John 8:32). The truth of which He spoke is that which follows.

Jesus came to do for us that which we could not possibly do on our own; He lived a perfectly sinless life. His lifestyle was replete with moral integrity, kindness toward His detractors, respectful of His parents and their earthly authority over Him, loving toward His family neighbors and consistent in the practice of adhering to absolute truth as taught in the Old Testament. The apostle Paul contrasted the life of Adam and that of Christ as follows: *For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of **grace** and of the **gift of righteousness** reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of **one act of***

righteousness** was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through **the obedience of the one man** the **many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:17-19) That is quite a mouthful; allow me to explain.

The "gift of righteousness" is that which is imputed to us when we are regenerated (born again) and saved. It is that "robe" of which Isaiah wrote; the one that all Christians wear. The "one man" is Jesus Christ who lived an "obedient" life before Jehovah (Yahweh). The "one act of righteousness" was a continuum; a persistent, perpetual line of sinless living from the time He became conscious of

His existence as a human (apart from a purely Divine existence) until he gave up His spirit on the cross and succumbed to physical death. When He said *it is finished* (John 19:30) He was referring to His earthly, human life of perfection during which time He earned the human righteousness we cannot earn on our own volition. The “many who” are “made righteous” are those believers living in the times before He walked the earth (B.C) and those who have trusted Him since (A.D.). Paul also said, *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him **we might become the righteousness of God.*** (2 Corinthians 5:21)

In His high priestly prayer recorded in the 17th chapter of John’s gospel we read, *For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.* To be sanctified is to be set apart from all of humanity, to become holy; to appear righteous before God. Now you may be thinking, Jesus is God; He was already holy. That is a true statement when it applies to His divine nature. But Jesus had a dual nature; both divine and human. It was His human nature that he sought to sanctify by living a perfectly sinless life. *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—**yet was without sin.*** (Hebrews 4:15) When Jesus was interceding with the Father in that role as our high priest He had just completed 33 years of living as an ordinary human being; the first 30 years of which were spent as a lowly carpenter. He had not sinned one iota, though tempted to do so on many occasions and in many ways. By living that way He earned for Himself a perfect human righteousness that He would impute to all who would believe in Him. The apostle Paul explained that this way; *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has **reconciled you by Christ's physical body** through death to present you **holy in his sight**, without blemish and free from accusation.* (Colossians 1:21-22) When Christ left heaven to become a human He began to reconcile us to God through that physical body that never committed one act of disobedience to the Father. Christ did and said exactly what the Father had told Him to do. Notice these words from the mouth of Christ Himself. To those standing around Him one day He said; *For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.* (John 12:49-50) Later on He also related these words; *But the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.* (John 14:31) Then to His Father He said, *I have brought you glory on earth by completing the*

work you gave me to do. (John 17:4) Finally we read in Paul's letter to the Philippians' church, *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!* (Philippians 2:8)

When we receive Christ as Lord and Savior through God's gift of faith, that robe of righteousness is placed upon us. *Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to **put off your old self**, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; **to be made new** in the attitude of your minds; and to **put on the new self**, created to be like God in **true righteousness and holiness.*** (Ephesians 4:21-24) We take off the old works related dirty diapers that were a stench in the nostrils of God and allow Him to place on us, clothe us with, the *garments of salvation and robe of righteousness* of which the prophet Isaiah spoke 600 years before Christ came to earn that righteousness on his behalf and ours.

In the OT book of Zechariah we find a beautiful picture that is emblematic of this event; presented very much as one would see in a one act play. There are four cast members: Joshua (a priest), Satan, Jesus Christ and Yahweh. The priest could be you or me. That is what we are in God's kingdom. Read what the apostle Peter wrote to each of us: *As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built*

*into a spiritual house to be a **holy priesthood**, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* (1 Peter 2:4-5) Satan is up to his old tricks as an accuser. That is how John referred to him in the book of Revelation. *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down."* (Revelation 12:10) Whenever you read "**the** angel of the LORD," as opposed to "**an** angel of the LORD," it always refers to Jesus in His pre-incarnate appearances (called theophanies). We find evidence of such visitations in several OT books. Finally, the fourth member of the cast of characters is YAWEH Himself, as indicated by the four major case letters; LORD.

*Then he showed me **Joshua the high priest** standing before **the angel of the LORD**, and **Satan***

*standing at his right side to accuse him. The **LORD** said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you." Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by. (Zechariah 3:1-5)*

God the Father (Yahweh) reminds Satan that He has snatched this believer from the fires of Hell. He was so close to being lost that he was on fire. This priest was a member of the elect of God, chosen to be a child of God *before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.* (Ephesians 1:4) The priest, prior to being sanctified and appearing holy, stood before Jesus in his "dirty diapers," his allegedly and seemingly good religious works, and Yahweh told Jesus to take them off. In other words He removed his sin. Then the priest (or you or me) became the beneficiary of an act of justification, solely the work of God, when he declared "I have taken away your sin." Immediately the newly regenerated believer was clothed with rich garments, including that robe of righteousness. Jesus, whose work was finished when He took away the dirty diapers and the sin, stood by while the Father applied the robe. This completed the first part of that golden chain reaction of which we read

in Romans 8:29-30. *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.* The conforming to the likeness of His Son came when we put on the robe of righteousness that Jesus had earned for us and imputed to us. Having predestined us, he called us by His Holy Spirit and took away our sin *nailing it to the cross.* (Colossians 2:14) So what's the deal? As Dr. Allen always says, "Here's the deal."

No works that we did prior to becoming Christians or religious activities that we engaged in before our spiritual regeneration (new birth) counted for anything in God's perspective any more than a diaper load of foul smelling excrement. In Isaiah chapter one, addressing all people who "play church," who count on their membership in a local parish, church or synagogue to gain them favor with God, He sets the record straight concerning that kind of hypocrisy. *Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted.*

From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the LORD. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. I cannot bear your evil assemblies When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood. (Isaiah 1: 5-6, 11-13, 15)

On the other hand, while "good works" or "fig leaves" don't bring us salvation, it was for the expressed purpose of doing good works that we were saved. *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* (Ephesians 2:10) How far in advance, you ask? From before God created the universe. Now we must understand that no amount of good that we do as servants of Christ will improve our standing before God one iota. We already possess the righteousness of Christ. Our position before God does not, it can not and it will not get any better than that. However, our good works do make us shine more for Christ and bring glory to the Father. Jesus implores us to *let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 5:16) Furthermore we must

understand that the performing of those good works are proof of our changed lives and a verification of our obedience to God. Simply put, no amount of good works we do after we are saved can improve on God's impression of us, or His love for us. However, those works (for which He has adequately equipped us through spiritual gifts) do say something very loudly and clearly regarding our impression of, and our love for, our infinite, personal and loving God. If we are truly wearing robes of righteousness and not simply sitting in a pew (no pun intended) wearing a dirty diaper, then we should be about doing the Lord's work assigned to us. That's the deal, and a mighty big deal it is.

Soli Deo Gloria

