

Ready and Waiting

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A common expression that has been used by most of us at one time or another is that which indicates that we are "ready and waiting" for something to happen, some place to go or someone to come our way. It may be a job for which we have applied, the arrival of guests we have invited to dinner or a task to be completed that someone has promised for our benefit or that of others. In addition to being ready and waiting, we should also be ready and willing, plus ready and able. If our Christian walk is sound, we can apply these very same principles regarding our readiness, ability, willingness and sensitivity toward being the true servants that God has called us each to be.

Dressed and Ready

A sure sign that we are ready, willing and able is the fact that we are dressed appropriately for the job at hand. A skilled tradesman will have donned his hardhat, Levi jeans, and steel-toed boots and have his tool belt strapped around his waist. A salesperson will be semi-formally dressed, briefcase in hand as will a person in the professions of law and medicine. A surgeon will be scrubbed, gowned, gloved and masked prior to the operative procedure and a groom will be decked out in a rented tuxedo watching his bride stroll gracefully down the church aisle, father in hand and adorned in her beautiful and quite costly gown.

In the Christian life, our clothing is spiritual in nature. It represents the righteousness of Christ imputed, accredited or allocated to us at the moment of our new birth in Christ. In Isaiah 61:10, we find the prophet saying that God has *"arrayed me with a robe of righteousness."* He was looking ahead to the

righteousness that Christ would earn through His perfect obedience to the will and laws of His Father Yahweh. We, on the other hand, look back to that finished work of Christ and the human righteousness that was earned by Him.

You see, that was one of the main reasons for Christ's first advent, His incarnation, God becoming a man. He came here to do what you and I are incapable of doing: living a perfect life. By doing so and committing no sin whatsoever (Hebrews 4:15), Christ earned for Himself an utterly perfect human righteousness: He had already possessed divine righteousness from all eternity past. In John 17:19 Jesus said, *For them I sanctify myself that they may be truly sanctified.* He became righteous (sanctified) that we might become righteous and holy in the Father's sight (Colossians 1:22) when we have been born again.

The righteousness earned by Christ included being willing to die on a cross for your sins and mine. The apostle Paul put it this way, Jesus *became obedient unto death, even death on a cross* (Philippians 2:8). Paul also told the church in Corinth that *God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God* (II Corinthians 5:21). His righteousness was imputed to us while our sins were imputed to Him.

Now we can see that in order to be dressed and ready for service and the Lord's return we must do as Paul told the Roman church when he said, *Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 13:14). That appropriation of new clothing is illustrated in a vision that the prophet Zechariah had which is recorded in the third chapter of that Old Testament book. Therein we find Satan and Jesus standing before the throne of God with a man named Joshua, a priest. They are contending for his soul and Jesus wins. Then Jesus utters a command to the angels standing by, *"Take off his filthy clothes"* and to Joshua He says, *"See I have taken away your sin and I have put rich garments on you."*

The filthy clothes were the garments that represented the self-righteousness that the priest had previously “worn” and upon which he had relied allegedly to make him worthy to enter eternal life with Yahweh. Isaiah made that false hope graphically clear when he referred to our good works, our self-righteous acts, as nothing but a pile of filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Only the righteousness of Christ, worn from the moment of our new birth, will make us acceptable in the eternal courts of heaven when we die, or at the throne of grace in prayer or worship while we abide here on earth.

Ready to...

Only after we have been clothed in Christ's righteousness are we ready to work for Him in this fallen world. His death on Calvary paid the price for our sins (Romans 6:33) and His work of living a perfect life provided the righteous clothing that we wear. Once made holy in God's sight, the Holy Spirit moved into our inner being, that is, our soul, and He provided us the tools (spiritual gifts) that would be needed to ready us for service. Though the tools are gifted to us, like power tools in a workshop, we must also learn how to use them.

Paul told the church at Ephesus that each Christian is *God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which he planned in advance for us to do* (Ephesians 2:10). Paul wrote to the Corinthian church and explained the spiritual gifts that each one of those believers had. We find those explanations in I Corinthians 12:1-11. *Now about spiritual gifts, my brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant...there are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service but the same Lord. There are different kinds of workings but the same works in all men.*

A word of explanation is needed here before we read further. Two Christians may have the same "gift" of teaching. However, the "services" they render with that gift may differ measurably. One believer may teach adults, another children. One may teach adults basic truths because they are in a state of spiritual infancy and another teacher may take an adult class deeper into the study of apologetics: the means of defending the faith. The "workings" of the two children's teachers may also differ. One may lead the young ones to Christ (evangelism) while another persuades the young ones to go into full time Christian service as a missionary or local pastor through the teacher's additional gift of encouragement or exhortation.

Paul continues, *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.* Note that every Christian has received at least one spiritual gift, and some more than one. They are not for the intention of making the recipient appear more spiritual than some other believer but instead are for the explicit purpose of "common good." They are to be used in reaching the as-yet unsaved members of God's family, or to encourage, lead, administer and grow those who have already become believers. Finally, after enumerating some of the spiritual gifts, Paul says this, *All these are the work of one and the same Spirit and He gives them to each one just as He determines.*

Those last four words are highly significant, "just as he determines." God knows the needs of the universal church and those of each local congregation when it comes to the distribution of spiritual gifts. As such, He will endow each new believer with the gift that will fill a void and serve the common good. Since it is He who determines which gifts are needed, that is, which gifts can best serve the church worldwide or a local community of Christians, we should not insist that a person have a particular gift to qualify as a true, Spirit-filled follower of Christ. Some congregations, for example, insist that the only way to prove that

you are a Spirit-filled Christian is to possess and manifest the gift of tongues. A simple reading of I Corinthians 14 should clear up that fallacious notion, once and for all. In Romans 12, Paul has more to say on the matter of spiritual gifts; you would do well to read those passages also.

Waiting on...

When we are out for dinner, the person waiting on us used to be referred to as a waiter or waitress; now they are referred to in a neuter, politically correct sense as servers. Their role in that eating establishment is to "wait on" the customers. In former days (and even now in the mansions of the super rich) homes were often filled with servants, especially in the South before the freeing of the slaves. Their role was to "wait on" the master of the house, his family and his guests. So it is with believers in this world. We are known biblically as "servants of Christ," working in the spiritual house of God, our Master. In Luke 12:35 one reads this caveat of Jesus: *Be dressed and ready for service and keep your lamps burning.* As we have already noted above, the attire is His righteousness and He provides that clothing when we have put our faith in Him (the faith given to us by God the Father- Ephesians 2:8-9). The reference to the "burning lamps" needs further explanation.

In those days, during the time of the first century apostolic church, homes were lit with lamps and the fuel for a lamp was oil. In biblical metaphor, oil represents the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 61:1). To keep one's lamp "burning" is to allow the Holy Spirit full control over one's life; to be "on fire" as it were, for Christ. In Psalm 18:28 we read of David saying, *You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning.*

David was pleading for Yahweh to keep him filled with God's Holy Spirit and both willing, able and ready to shed the light of God's truth into the dark world around him. We can keep our lamps burning by engaging in a habit of prayer, a study of God's Word, regular worship and the administration of God's grace through our spiritual gifts.

The apostle Peter continues the teaching about spiritual gifts with this simple, yet succinct admonition: *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength that God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ* (I Peter 4: 8-11).

Waiting for...

Ever since Christ left the earth and ascended into heaven, bodily and visibly (Acts 1:9-11) Christians have been waiting for His return: His second coming. That expectant attitude is known as the "imminent return" theology. Imminent means impending, looming or about to happen. In other words, Christ could come at any moment. His imminent return was likened to a "thief in the night" who comes when you least expect him and without warning: Exact dates impossible to know.

Digressing for a brief period, allow me to explain another word that is quite close in pronunciation to the word imminent; it is the word immanent. That expression literally means existing within, extending into or indwelling. It has to do with God's ubiquity or omnipresence. Recall that Jesus is also called Emanuel: "God with us." Thus we speak of God's immanence as referring to either the local presence of Christ during his sojourn on Earth, the ubiquitous Divine Person Yahweh (Jehovah God) or the Holy Spirit, the indwelling, ever present Being who

resides in the soul of every true, Christian believer.

In Luke 12:36-38 Jesus, having spoken of being dressed and ready (vs. 35) continued with this warning, *Like men waiting for their master to return...it will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when He comes...it will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready...* Then in verse 40, He issues this caveat, *You also must be ready because the Son of man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him.*

Recall in the passage above that the Lord has said that we are not just to be awaiting His imminent return (arms folded and feet propped up) but we are also to be watching. To watch means to guard, pay attention to, examine, beware, be alert and be cautious about. A guard is a sentry who is posted at the door of a special place to keep unwanted intruders out. We are urged to *Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you; guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us* (II Timothy 1:14). That "good deposit" was the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). In Proverbs 4:20 the Lord says, *My son, pay attention to what I say.* What God says to each of us is present within the pages of the Holy Scriptures, the revelation of God's character, will and plans for us.

In II Corinthians 13:5 Paul advises thusly, *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.* Some people think that they are "in the faith" simply because they were raised in a Christian home, attend church or live a "good" life. We are only "in the faith" if the Holy Spirit is in us, we have placed our God-given faith in the finished work of Christ and have received Him as our Lord and Savior. Recently I had a discussion with a man who told me that he "thought" that he was "probably" a Christian. Thus, his faith was merely putative. That gentleman was an insurance salesman. When I heard him utter that rather qualified statement of faith, I asked him if that answer would satisfy

him if he had asked me if I had any life, auto or homeowner's insurance. Would he be assured of my security if I had said that I thought that I had those policies or that I probably had them? He freely admitted that an answer like that would not be at all pleasing to him. I then told him that his answer was likewise displeasing and the matter of his eternal life policy was in need of a further examination.

In Luke 12 Jesus taught a parable about a rich fool and he advised His listeners to beware of greed. That causes us to love money more than God and it is said to be the root of all kinds of evil. The enemy of our soul, the devil himself will use greed to accomplish his work in us as opposed to the work of the Holy Spirit. Peter warned of the devil's schemes when he said *Be self-controlled, be alert; your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour* (1 Peter 5:8). Reading Proverbs 12:26 tells us that *A righteous man is cautious in friendship*. We all need friends, but we had better choose them wisely. *Bad company corrupts good character* (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Every true believer is looking forward to being with Christ forever in our heavenly home of rest, peace, joy and love. Most of us would prefer going there in the rapture when we are *changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye* as the apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers (1 Corinthians 15:57). That event will do a metamorphic work on our bodies changing them from a perishable to an imperishable state and converting our mortality into immortality. However, while that event may come at any moment, some of us may suffer a natural death and a translation into heavenly glory through that event. Whichever way God's perfect plan for us involves (Psalm 139:16); we should all be waiting for Christ while waiting on each other. We should be dressed and ready for our eventual, inevitable trip into heaven while at the same time we are dressed and ready to do Christ's work here on earth until that glorious day comes.

Soli Deo gloria