

BEYOND TODAY

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Our most important garment

Clothing keeps us warm, protecting and shielding us. It also speaks volumes about us as individuals. There is, however, a particular item of apparel that God wants to see a Christian wearing.

Clothing makes a statement about the kind of individuals we are, and the fashion industry is influential in what numerous people wear. It's big business and governs the latest styles both sought and worn by many.

It may seem strange to contemplate the idea that God is actually concerned about what we wear, but Jesus Christ illustrated that His Father is indeed interested in our clothing. In the context of faith during His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compared the lilies of the field to the regal garments of King Solomon (Matthew 6:28-30).

However, beyond physical clothing that is modest and appropriate for the occasion, especially at those times when we appear before Him, our Heavenly Father is keen that we be clothed with one specific garment.

Clothing reveals a mindset

Job interviewers and those working in human resources may be trained to assess potential employees by what they wear. Choosing the correct clothing for a particular circumstance can show respect. Conversely, dressing down, perhaps in a sloppy manner, or giving an impression that might suggest poor character, may not only seem disrespectful, but could cause offence.

A measure of formality is often more appropriate in such circumstances, since what we choose to wear reflects how we feel about a given situation. Christ alluded to

this in the parable of the wedding feast for the king's son (Matthew 22:1-14). On this occasion, a man failed to be properly dressed for the wedding. Some scholars believe

Following baptism Christians are to begin wearing their best apparel – Jesus Christ Himself.

that poorer guests were actually presented with wedding garments by the king, so this man had no acceptable excuse (verses 11-12).

His failure to put on the correct attire suggests that, unlike the rest of the guests, he did not respect either his host or the event and indeed had rejected his ruler's gracious gift. The context of this parable is mentioned in verse 2. It is a parable concerning the Kingdom of Heaven (or Kingdom of God), and Christ is explaining who will be fit for inclusion, and who will not.

Garments that reflect Christ's character

In Galatians 3:27, the apostle Paul wrote: "For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ." The words "put on" here have the sense of sinking into a garment, something that surrounds and envelops us. Paul makes the connection between being baptised and "wearing" Christ. This is because following water bap-

tism and receipt of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, Jesus Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20). We should, therefore, also be reflecting Him in all our words, deeds and actions.

Paul expands on this thought in Romans 6:1-4, where those who have been baptised are pictured as having died to sin and raised to a new life in Christ (verse 4). Following baptism Christians are to begin wearing their best apparel – Jesus Christ Himself.

Just as Christ did not commit sin, Christians must also strive to overcome and not to let sin have any power over them (verses 12-13). Several of the prophets

tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering [patience], bearing with one another and forgiving one another (Colossians 3:8-13).

Apparel that represents righteousness

Christians should be making a categorical statement about themselves by the spiritual garments that they are striving to wear. Paul again uses the analogy of “sinking into a garment” in Ephesians 4:23-24, when he exhorts believers to “put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” To put on Christ is to take on His characteristics and conduct. With Christ in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9-10), we should also be outwardly reflecting God’s holiness in our lives, to the best of our ability with the help He provides.

In the book of Revelation, the elderly apostle John quotes Christ as counselling seven churches of Asia Minor. Along with their Christian commonality, each of these congregations displays somewhat different characteristics.

The Church at Laodicea has the attitude that they are self-sufficient, needing nothing. Christ tells them that spiritually they are deficient and instead counsels them to buy from Him “white garments, that you may be clothed” (Revelation 3:18). Christians need to ensure that they are clothed spiritually in apparel representing righteousness.

When referring to the Church as the wife of the Lamb in Revelation 19:7-8, John says in this prophecy that it would be granted to her “to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”

While we remain as physical humans, from time to time we will stumble in our Christian lives and commit sin. But having fought temptations to sin for so long and sincerely tried to stay clean (as we were when we came up out of the waters of baptism), we will be granted fine linen at the time of Christ’s coming and the first resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:51-54; Philippians 3:20-21). Every time true Christians sincerely repent of sin, the blood of Christ cleanses each of them, restoring them to a right relationship with their Heavenly Father (see 1 John 1:7-9). It is Christ living in us that gives us the hope of future glory (Colossians 1:27).

Beyond our physical lives today, Christ will resurrect those who are His at His return. He has promised that they will receive a glorious body like His and will be clothed in fine garments, fully reflecting His righteousness.

David Fenney



Christ’s life, role and character is recorded throughout the entire Bible in both Old and New Testaments. To put on His attributes, His followers need a thorough knowledge of both from studying the Bible.

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symbolically compare dirty clothing to sin. For instance, the prophet Isaiah described our own attempts at righteousness as “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Another prophet saw the high priest Joshua dressed in filthy garments and standing before the angel of the LORD. God’s solution was to take away the filthy garments and give Joshua a clean change of clothing. However, God links the change of garments to taking away sin by saying, “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes” (Zechariah 3:1-4).

Sin is only forgiven upon real repentance. Thus, from these scriptures we can conclude that our outward appearance should reflect an inward change of heart.

Still with the sense of sinking into a garment, the apostle Paul gives several lists of the characteristics we are to put off and those qualities that should replace them. The list of traits to discard includes malice, lying, thefts, corrupt language and anger.

Instead, we should put on the knowledge of God,

Under threat: *God's manual for humanity*

The Word of God should serve as a spiritual handbook for humankind, but today there is a concerted attack on God's Word. Will it succeed?

In an increasingly secular society many pride themselves on their irreligious stance. They feel no need to read what they consider an essentially theological book such as the Bible. Certainly, they feel no compunction to follow its teachings.

Today the belief in a Creator God is plummeting at an ever-increasing rate, fed by an anti-God sentiment which is so prevalent in society. Accompanying this decline is the dwindling of moral standards – absolutes that have their origin in the Judeo/Christian Bible, the divinely inspired Word of God.

The English King Henry VI commissioned the building of Kings College Chapel in Cambridge late in the 15th century to gain favour among the people of England. Inside the chapel, 26 pre-Reformation stained glass windows depicting biblical and historical scenes from the Septuagint Bible were commissioned. On the outside of the west door of the chapel the four-letter name of God was carved in Hebrew and is still visible today. Taken from Exodus 3:14 in the Old Testament, YHWH is a word meaning something like “I AM WHO I AM” – i.e. the everliving One, the Eternal.

In the New Testament Jesus identified Himself with the same name when He told the religious leaders in Jerusalem, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). They understood that He was revealing Himself as the member of the Godhead who had been with their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For this claim they attempted to stone Him. (To study who and what Jesus Christ was, please request or download our booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.)

Rejection of biblical absolutes

There is a tendency in human beings to reject anything that is genuinely godly in nature. The apostle Paul refers to this negative aspect of man, when stating, “Because the carnal [i.e. human] mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:7).

Reflecting these views, God is no longer believed to be the I AM but the I WAS. Some even go further in wanting

to ban the Bible altogether. This human view makes it easier for non-believers to reject the moral standards taught in God's Word. It enables society to cast aside a way of life God set out from the beginning. This rejection of godly concepts is leading the world into a spiritual dark age – a dark age that has consequences.

In both the Old and New Testament, God makes certain demands on His creation, of which the Ten Commandments are the most fundamental.

We are witnessing a concerted effort by man to minimise the importance of biblical standards, with some aggressively trying to ban the Bible.

The first four of these laws regulate the relationship between God and man and the last six our relationship with each other. Jesus summarised them as two great commandments (Matthew 22:37-39). Christ continued: “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (verse 40). This highlights the importance of the laws of God in our lives – divine laws from creation that were codified for the children of Israel some 3500 years ago to be preserved for everyone to follow throughout history. These laws have no expiration date, as many would have us believe. (To learn more please request or download our booklet *The Ten Commandments*.)

Lifelong handbook for all

In the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses), the first of the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament, there is instruction to “live by every word of God.” But to whom is this addressed? Was it only to the Israelites? A closer look at the statement in Deuteronomy 8:3 reveals that “*man* shall not live by bread alone; but . . . by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.” Here “man” is referring to the whole human race.

Given that humanity usually prefers to determine its own criteria for “right” and “wrong,” Jesus asserted that the religious leaders of His day taught the commandments of men for doctrine, rather than the Word of God (Mark

7:8-13). We could make that same assertion today.

Importance of biblical principles

The prophet Jeremiah understood the importance of God's law. He declared, "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

The Bible remains God's instruction book for man, to show us how to live a morally upright life. It should be required reading for everyone.

Embracing a way of life based on God's laws coupled with mercy has never been more important than it is today. We are witnessing a concerted effort by man to minimise the importance of biblical standards, with some aggressively trying to ban the Bible. The prophet Amos foretold a time when "the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, 'that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD'" (Amos 8:11). While access to God's words may become more difficult, we can be reassured that they can never be permanently destroyed as we read: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands

forever" (Isaiah 40:8; also quoted in 1 Peter 1:24-25). The Hebrew prophet's divinely inspired words have proven true despite the many attempts to destroy God's Word.

As the offer of salvation is afforded every human being, so is man's obligation to "live by every word of God." All need to be familiar with God's teachings. The Psalmist wrote, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11).

Christ promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit residing in them as a gift from the Father would help them recall all they had learned from their Master (John 14:26). Those with little knowledge of the scriptures have nothing to bring to remembrance, so why not study this spiritual guidebook more thoroughly by enrolling in our free 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*.

This is an important step towards equipping yourself with a greater understanding of God's plan and purpose for you personally, your family members, your nation and the world as a whole. Now is the time to learn of the great themes and principles revealed in God's Word before any famine of the word befalls us.

Gerhard Marx

Animal welfare endorsed

At creation, God gave human beings "dominion" over the other creatures He had made. Throughout the Bible are instructions on how that "dominion" ought to be administered.

Animals, especially those we tend to keep as pets, so often wheedle their way into our hearts. My little dog, Patch, was one such character. He welcomed me when I came in through the door and loved to jump onto my lap. When I took him for walks, he was always enthusiastic. I was heartbroken for two years after he died.

As companions and "co-workers" such as working dogs or horses, animals can become very important to us. Children are able to learn elements of responsibility by caring for a pet. Their deaths are liable to affect us deeply and, as most animals have shorter life spans than human beings, that could occur multiple times during one person's life, reminding us perhaps of our own mortality.

Those who observe animals closely recognise their diverse personalities, how they react to people and situations, what they fear and when they are relaxed.

Dominion does not equal exploitation

Unlike human beings, animals are not made in God's image and cannot develop that intimate relationship with



Pets come in all varieties, shapes and sizes. They represent just a tiny fraction of God's wonderful creation.

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Him offered to His potential sons and daughters. The book of Genesis records, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God

created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Genesis 1:26-28).

“Dominion” is translated from a Hebrew word transliterated *râdâh* (Strong’s *Hebrew Dictionary*, H7287). While the word means to subjugate, or to rule, in order that humanity’s oversight of the living world would not turn into exploitation, God also told us how to treat His creation.

Perhaps the best practice of human dominion over animals is summed up in Proverbs: “A righteous man regards the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel” (Proverbs 12:10).

Scriptures that contain instructions for animal welfare, sometimes with a parallel implication for human relationships, include:

- Not muzzling an ox when it is treading out the grain (Deuteronomy 25:4). The principle here is not to torment it or take advantage of it.
- Letting work animals rest on the Sabbath day (Exodus 23:12).
- Ensuring the safety of straying animals or those struggling under a burden (Exodus 23:4-5).

In the context of healing the infirm on the Sabbath day, Christ mentioned further familiar principles of animal welfare. He exclaimed, “Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it?” (Luke 13:15). In a similar situation, He demanded, “Which of you, having a

donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?” (Luke 14:5).

The keeping of pets was not unknown in the Scriptures. In response to David’s sin with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan brought the king to repentance by using a story about a man with a pet lamb (2 Samuel 12:1-4). David had been a shepherd, caring for his father’s sheep, so would have understood this analogy.

Even wild birds are considered: “If a bird’s nest happens to be before you along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, with the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; you shall surely let the mother go, and take the young for yourself, that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days” (Deuteronomy 22:6-7).

No eternal potential promised

Pets are not promised immortality as members of God’s family. It would seem unlikely that in a spiritual kingdom, the “former things” – elements of the physical creation – would be able to exist (Revelation 21:1 and 4).

We are assured that God shall wipe away every tear (verse 4). We are promised there are pleasures and joy in God’s presence (Psalm 16:11). While the Bible is silent on what any of this might mean in the context of physical pets we have known, our Heavenly Father’s realm will no doubt be filled with wonders (1 Corinthians 2:9).

For the present, as God has instructed, we should always regard the lives of our animals and treat them well in every respect, whether they be for food, work or as our companions.

Philip Perry

A cautionary note for animal lovers

A word of warning to those who tend to jump into situations without first considering potential dangers: injured or frightened animals, or any with young, have been known to lash out even at those trying to help them.

Bites, pecks, and scratches can result from incautious interactions with both domestic and wild creatures. These can lead to bacterial infections, and while there is no classical rabies currently in the UK, a bite from a bat could result in viral transmission of a rare variant strain EBLV-2a ([www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/bats-and-disease/bats-and-disease-in-the-uk/bats-and-](http://www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/bats-and-disease/bats-and-disease-in-the-uk/bats-and-rabies-faqs)

[rabies-faqs](http://www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/bats-and-disease/bats-and-disease-in-the-uk/bats-and-rabies-faqs)). Such transmissions can be fatal.

Wash any animal-inflicted wounds that have broken the skin and seek immediate medical attention (see www.nhs.uk/conditions/animal-and-human-bites/). Don’t handle bats even if dead (www.bats.org.uk/ advice).

Be even more vigilant with all animals if travelling abroad. Most UK rabies infections and other “exotic” diseases result from exposure to them overseas.

Keep pet vaccinations and parasite treatments up to date and wash your hands after interaction with animals, especially those you don’t own.

Recognising God's calling

Scripture clearly tells us that it is God who initiates a relationship with an individual. Without that "calling" no one can come to Him.

When God opens an individual's mind, His word begins to make sense. We see our human nature more clearly against the standard set by a righteous, holy God and realise how short we fall of His character (Romans 3:23). A desire grows to bring that human nature into line with what He expects of us and we experience deep sorrow for having disobeyed Him thus far. This leads to repentance – a change of direction in our lives, away from our lawless deeds to begin to take on the characteristics of Jesus Christ. We begin to choose what is right and good in our Heavenly Father's eyes and reject evil, even to the extent that, in time, our very thoughts become subject to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

A difficult path that many miss

Christ taught that salvation was a difficult path and few find it (Matthew 7:13-14). That is because God the Father is not calling everyone to Him now. He is the master potter who is working with and shaping Christians (Isaiah 64:8). He is also the master of perfect timing. If God is calling an individual now, it is because this fits best with His plan to bring as many sons and daughters as possible into His family (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

In Matthew 13, Christ recounted a parable to explain the different responses to God's calling. Some were not being called; they heard the message but missed its significance; some grasped the meaning but cared more about what others thought and rejected it. Others began to respond but became caught up in material matters and lost interest. A fourth group took the calling seriously, understood it and put it into practice.

Nothing is more important than God's calling. Jesus Christ tells us, "No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44).

Promises to those God calls now

If we deeply repent of our former ways and continue to grow in grace and knowledge, accepting God's way of life as revealed in the Bible, and not deviating from that path, then Jesus Christ has promised that when He returns He will grant us eternal life and change our mortal fleshly bodies into glorious spiritual ones just like His

(Philippians 3:21; Colossians 3:4). This is the first or *better* resurrection (Hebrews 11:35).

Individuals called now have the awesome opportunity to prepare and be trained for the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. All those then living will be able to learn God's laws and His ways (Isaiah 2:3).

Thus we are in training to have positions of rulership with Jesus Christ upon His return. That requires much diligence as we become students of God's Word. However, at the same time, we as "called out ones" are to become lights in a world that is rapidly becoming darkened (Matthew 5:14-16; Philippians 2:15). We are to exemplify God's way of life to all around us, so that in our actions, words and behaviours people see a reflection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ tells us, "No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44).

If we have begun to put the truth of God's word into action and are growing in righteous character and wisdom in the ways of the Almighty, He promises through His Holy Spirit to help us develop the spiritual characteristics that we lack.

For all eternity

Thousands of years ago the prophet Daniel was inspired to write of those who have responded to God's calling, have begun to repent of their former ways and have diligently sought to live according to God's way of life: "Those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).

That is the reward of the ones called now, and who take that calling seriously – life that will last not just a few years, or a few decades, but for eternity.

Terry Oldfield

(To study further please request or download our booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*).



Q Why do Bibles mention both sonship and adoption in respect of our relationship with God? Surely these are different?

FAQ

A These concepts may indeed create confusion, which originates in a poor translation in the King James Version of the Bible.

Vine's *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (1985), in its entry on "adoption" states: "The KJV, 'adoption of children' is a mistranslation and misleading. God does not 'adopt' believers as children; they are begotten as such by His Holy Spirit through faith." This is an important distinction – as it directly impacts our destiny.

Scripture reveals that mankind's destiny is to be fathered by God in an actual sense, with His Holy Spirit implanted into our minds to engender us as His literal begotten children (Romans 8:16;).

The Spirit-begotten Christian is a child of God, an actual member of the God family – but not yet in their

ultimate form (1 John 3:1-2). As children, we must still go through a development process in this life – a period of building godly character, becoming more like God.

Yet a few verses written by the apostle Paul have been interpreted to say that God adopts us rather than directly begets us as His children. What difference does it make? And what is the truth of the matter?

Some may imagine that we are transferred from our biological parentage or from the rule of the devil (see John 8:44), to God as our new parent. Yet all human beings are ultimately God's offspring from the start, even biologically (Acts 17:28-29), as He was the Father of Adam and Eve by creation (Luke 3:38) and is involved in the procreative process in the womb (Psalms 139:13-16).

Satan has been a father to people only in the sense of wielding dominion and influence over them and raising them in his way. Yet they are truly God's children – and He redeems them (buys them back) through His plan of salvation. Moreover, when God spiritually engenders us as His own children by His Spirit – His divine power emanating from His own being – this in no way equates to adoption.

Adoption means taking a child of other parents as one's own son or daughter. It is a wonderful and noble act to provide a home and family to one who needs it and it is typically a great blessing to both the adoptive parents and the child. There are many who accept and love their adopted children as much as they would a child of their own body, as well they should, for he or she is a human being made in the image of God. (Consider that Jesus Christ Himself was essentially adopted by Joseph, who was not His real father – that being God the Father.)

In human adoption, the adopted children are just as human as the new parents – yet only because the children were adopted from other human parents who physically begot them. But if God merely adopted us and did not truly beget us in His image, we would be different kinds of beings from Him altogether, as He would not be adopting us from others like Himself. It could be likened in some sense to adopting a pet as a family member (albeit one that could talk).

Sadly, this is close to what many envision – that we are, and forever will be, totally different, inferior kinds of beings. Thus they have no problem with taking the Greek word in question to mean adoption. But this notion of God's purpose for us is not the truth, as Scripture makes clear that God actually begets us spiritually in His own image – with the intention that we ultimately become the same kind of beings He and Jesus Christ now are.

To study this important subject further, please request or download our booklet *Why Were You Born?*

Let the Bible Answer...

What does the Bible say about the poor?

God observes responses to the poor: Leviticus 23:22; Leviticus 25:35; Psalms 41:1; 72:4; Proverbs 14:31.

God blesses those who are kind to the poor: Psalm 41:1; Proverbs 19:17; 14:21; 22:9; 28:27; Acts 10:1-4.

God is not pleased with those who ill-treat the poor: Deuteronomy 15:7-11; 24:15; Proverbs 14:31; 17:5.

Christians are to help the poor as they are able: Mark 14:7; John 13:29; Galatians 2:10.



Letters From Our Readers

Encouragement, hope and comfort in uncertain times

Thank you for your excellent magazines, especially in an ever-changing world, to uplift us and help us draw closer to our Creator. In spite of the chaotic world we live in, He is in ultimate control.

Reader in Devon

Your magazine is very helpful to me. It gives me hope and encouragement in the midst of what is happening in the world. I really learn a lot from it.

Reader in Leicester

Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Your resources are such a blessing, encouraging me to see our circumstances with new eyes in the light of the return of Christ to earth.

Reader in London

You are being used by God during these very uncertain and frightening times to warn, inspire, comfort, encourage and help [us] understand God's word and purposes in a very clear and easy-to-understand way. Your work is very much appreciated.

Reader in Sutton Coldfield

Hungry for God's word

Thanks for the word of life. You are feeding me with spiritual food.

Reader in Sunderland

I wish to renew my free subscription. It feeds me in difficult times.

Reader in Scotland

I am enjoying the [Bible Study] Course even though I have taken

my time. It has been very helpful in encouraging me to go forward in my studies of God's law and His Holy Days and much more. I now know what is meant by being hungry. I pray it never stops.

By email

Requests for Bible Study Course

I recently came back to the word of God and found so much to learn. I look forward to doing this course.

Reader from London

When my father passed early this year, I started to read the Bible again and want to study it, so I can understand its lessons. I've found peace in a painful period of life and thank God for His guidance.

Student in Leeds

I believe that taking part in your free 12-lesson *Bible Study Course* would enable me to have a closer relationship with God.

Student in London

Truth found in Scripture

After reading the booklet *Is the Bible True?* it further confirms my belief that God is real no matter what any human being may say.

Reader in Erith

Consequences of lost faith

I feel the world has lost its faith and its humanity to one another. Christianity and the Bible are almost dirty words to be shunned and mocked. We need to wake up now and face up to the consequences of shutting out God and Jesus.

Reader in Skegness

How this work is supported

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