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978-1-107-65558-4 - The Sermons of Henry Smith: The Silver-Tongued Preacher

A Selection Edited by John Brown

Excerpt

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THE WEDDING GARMENT

Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.—Rom. xiii. 14.

THERE be many fashions of apparel, but they are too light, or too heavy, or too coarse, or too stale, and all wear out. At last the apostle found a fashion that surpasseth them all; it is never out of fashion, meet for all seasons, fit for all persons, and such a profitable weed, that the more it is worn the fresher it is. What fashion have you seen comparable to this? It is not like the clothes of David's ambassadors, which covered their upper parts, 2 Sam. x. 4; nor like Saul's armour, which tired David when he should fight with it, 1 Sam. xvii. 39; nor like the counterfeit Jeroboam's wife, which disguised herself to go unknown, 1 Kings xiv. 2; nor like the old rags of the Gibeonites, which deceived Joshua, Joshua ix. 4, 5; nor like the paltry suit of Micah, which he gave once a year to his Levite, Judges xvii. 10; nor like the glutton's flaunt, which jetted in purple every day; nor like the light clothes which Christ said are in kings' courts, and make them lighter that wear

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them, Mat. xi. 8. But it is like the garment of the high priests, which had all the names of the tribes of Israel written upon his breast, Exod. xxviii. 21; so all the names of the faithful are written in the breast of Christ, and registered in the book of his merits, Mal. iii. 16. It is like Elias's mantle, which divided the waters, 2 Kings ii. 8; so he divided our sins and punishments, that they which are clothed with Christ, are armed both against sin and death. It is like the garments of the Israelites in the wilderness, which did not wear; forty years together they wandered in the desert, and yet, saith Moses, their shoes were not worn, but their apparel was as when they came out of Egypt, Deut. xxix. 5; so the righteousness of Christ doth last for ever, and his merits are never worn out.

This garment Paul hath sent unto you, to go before the king of heaven and earth, a holy garment, a royal garment, an immaculate garment, an everlasting garment; a garment whereof every hem is peace of conscience, every plait is joy in the Holy Ghost, every stitch is the remission of some sin, and saveth him which weareth it. If we put on Christ, we are clothed with his obedience, whereby our wickedness is covered; we are clothed with his merits, whereby our sins are forgiven; we are clothed with his Spirit, whereby our hearts are mollified, and sanctified, and renewed,

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till we resemble Christ himself. This is the apostle's meaning, to put on Christ, as it is unfolded in Col. iii. 12. Where he brings forth all the robes of Christ, and sorts of them, and saith, Put on mercy, put on meekness, put on humility, put on patience, put on love; all which before he called the new man. So that to put on Christ, is to put on the new man with all his virtues, until we be renewed to the image of Christ, which is like a new man amongst men. They which labour to be righteous, and yet believe that Christ's righteousness shall save them, have put on Christ as Paul would have them. We are not taught to put on angels, nor saints, nor the Virgin Mary, nor Paul himself, to cover our sins with their righteousness, as the papists do; but we are commanded to put on Christ, and cover our sins with his righteousness. The body hath many garments, but the soul hath one garment. Every clout will cover our sores, but the finest silk will not cover our sins. Therefore when we seem brave to others, we seem foul to God, because his eye is upon our sins, which lie naked when all the rest is covered, until we put on Christ, and then we hear the voice, 'Thy sins are forgiven,' and we have the blessing, 'Blessed is the man whose sin is covered.' So we are clothed and blessed together.

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Now let us see how to put this garment on. Many fumble about it, like children which have need of one to put on their clothes. Some put on Christ like a precious head-tire, which all day is worn, beautified with jewels, and beset with gems, to make the face seem more amiable; but at night that riches is laid aside, and the head muffled with some regardless tire. Thus do our curious women put on Christ, who when they hear the messengers of grace offering this garment, and preparing to make the body fit to be garnished with so glorious a vesture, as Paul did the Romans, first washing away drunkenness and gluttony, then chambering and wantonness, then strife and envy, and so sin after sin, they seem like the stony ground to receive it with joy, and think to beautify their heads with this precious ointment; but when he tells them there is no communion between Christ and Belial, that if this garment be put on, all other vanities must be put off; they then turn their day into darkness, and reject Christ, that would be an eternal crown of beauty to their heads, and wrap their temples in the uncomely rags and refuse of every nation's pride; and in these toys they cause their servants to spend many hours on every day in the week, but especially on the Sabbath day, to deck their bodies, as if they were but little children, which

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had need of one to put on their clothes. Some put on Christ as a cloak, which hangeth upon their shoulders, and covereth them: when they go abroad to be seen of men, they can cast on the cloak of holiness, and seem for a while as holy as the best; but so soon as they come home the cloak goeth off, and the man is as he was, whose vizard was better than his face. Thus hypocrites put on Christ, as many retain unto noblemen, not to do them any service, but to have their countenance. Many put on Christ like a hat, which goeth off to every one which meets them; so every temptation which meets them, makes them forget what they heard, what they promised, what they resolved, and change their way as though they had not repented at all. So the common people (like yourselves) put on Christ: they are zealous so long as they are in the church, and beat their breasts, and cast up their eyes like the publican, Luke xviii. 13, when they hear a sentence which moves them; as though they would do no more against that saying whiles they live; but the next business putteth all out of mind till they come to the church again. Some put on Christ as a glove, which covereth but the hand; so they put on the face of Christ, or the tongue of Christ; but their hands work, and their feet walk, as they did before. So many professors of religion put on Christ,

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which call but for discipline and reformation, that they might get a name of zeal and sincerity to cover some fault which they would not be suspected of. Thus every man would cover himself with Christ, but they have not the skill, or they have not the will to put him on.

Now hear how Christ must be put on. As the angel taught John to read the book when he bade him eat it, so must we put on Christ, as if we did eat him. As the meat is turned into the substance of the body and goeth through every part of man, so Christ and his word should go from part to part till we be of one nature with them.

Thus we must put on Christ; for the word signifieth to put him on, as thou wouldest put him in, that he may be one with thee, and thou with him, as it were in a body together. As he hath put on all our infirmities, so we must put on all his graces, not half on, but all on, and clasp him to us, and gird him about us, and wear him, even as we wear our skin, which is alway about us. Then there shall be no need of wires, nor curls, nor periwigs; the husbands shall not be forced to rack their rents, nor enhance their fines, nor sell their lands to deck their wives; but as the poor mantle of Elijah seemed better to Elisha than all the robes of Solomon, 2 Kings ii. 13, so the wedding garment shall seem better than all

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the flaunts of vanity, and put every fashion out of fashion, which is not modest and comely like itself.

Thus have you heard what is meant by putting on Christ: first, to clothe ourselves with righteousness and holiness like Christ; and then, because our own righteousness is too short to cover our arms, and legs, and thighs of sin, but still some bare place will peer out, and shame us in the sight of God, therefore we must borrow Christ's garments, as Jacob did his brother's, Gen. xxvii. 15, and cover ourselves with his righteousness; that is, believe that his righteousness shall supply our unrighteousness, and his sufferings shall stand for our sufferings, because he came to fulfil the law, and bear the curse, and satisfy his Father for us, that all which believe in him might not die, but have life everlasting, John iii. 16.

Now I have shewed you this goodly garment, you must go to another to help you to put it on; and none can put this garment upon you, but he which is the garment, the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore to him let us pray.

Thou must put him on as *Lord*; that is, thy ruler to command thee, thy tutor to govern thee, and thy master to direct thee; thou must be no man's servant but his, take no man's part against him, but say with the apostles, 'Whether is it

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meet to obey God or thee?' Acts iv. 19. Thou must put him on as *Jesus*, that is, thy Saviour in whom thou trustest, thy protector on whom thou dependest, thy Redeemer on whom thou believest; thou must not look for thy salvation from angel, nor saint, nor anything beside him. For the name of *Jesus* signifieth a Saviour, which is given to none but him, and he is not only called the *Saviour*, but the *Salvation*, in the Song of Simeon, Luke i. 69, to shew that he is the only Saviour; for there be many saviours, but there can be but one salvation; as there may be many tortures, and yet but one death. Therefore, when he is called the *Salvation*, it implieth that there is no saviour beside him. Thou must put him on as *Christ*, that is, a king to rule, a prophet to teach, a priest to pray and sacrifice, and pacify the wrath of God for thee. For this name *Christ* doth signify that he was anointed a king, a priest, and a prophet for man: a king to rule him, a priest to offer sacrifice for him, a prophet to teach him. So that he putteth on *Christ* as *Lord*, which worshippeth none but him; he putteth on *Christ* as *Jesus*, which believeth in none but him; and he putteth on *Christ* as *Christ*, which worshippeth none but him, believeth in none but him, and heareth none but him.

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A PREPARATIVE TO MARRIAGE

YOU are come hither to be contracted in the Lord; that is, of two to be made one, Gen. ii. 18; for as God hath knit the bones and sinews together for the strengthening of men's bodies, so he hath knit man and woman together for the strengthening of their life, because 'two are firmer than one,' Eccles. iv. 9. And therefore, when God made the woman for man, he said, 'I will make him an help,' shewing that man is stronger by his wife. Every marriage, before it be knit, should be contracted, as it is shewed in Exod. xxii. 16, and Deut. xxii. 28: which stay between the contract and the marriage was the time of longing, for their affection to settle in, because the deferring of that which we love doth kindle the desire, which, if it came easily and speedily unto us, would make us set less by it. Therefore we read how Joseph and Mary were contracted before they were married, Mat. i. 18. In the contract Christ was conceived, and in the marriage Christ was born, that he might honour both estates: virginity with his conception, and marriage with his birth. You

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are contracted, but to be married. Therefore I pass from contracts to speak of marriage, which is nothing else but a communion of life between man and woman joined together according to the ordinance of God.

First, I will shew the excellency of marriage; then the institution of it; then the causes of it; then the choice of it; then the duties of it; and lastly, the divorcement of it.

Well might Paul say, Heb. xiii. 4, 'marriage is honourable'; for God hath honoured it himself. It is honourable for the author, honourable for the time, and honourable for the place. Whereas all other ordinances were appointed of God by the hands of men, or the hands of angels, Acts xii. 7, Heb. ii. 2, marriage was ordained by God himself, which cannot err. No man nor angel brought the wife to the husband, but God himself, Gen. ii. 22; so marriage hath more honour of God in this than all other ordinances of God beside, because he solemnized it himself.

Then it is honourable for the time, for it was the first ordinance that God instituted, even the first thing which he did, after man and woman were created, and that in the state of innocency, before either had sinned: like the finest flower, which will not thrive but in a clean ground. Before man had any other calling, he was called to be an