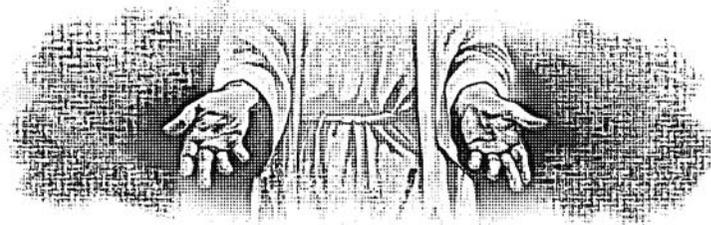


Clothed *in* Christ



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 3:26–29, Rom. 6:1–6, Col. 3:1–10, Eph. 4:22–24, 1 Cor. 15:49–55, 2 Cor. 5:1–4.*

Memory Text: “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (*Romans 13:14, NIV*).

Have you ever dropped an egg and watched it break into messy pieces? One thing, though, you have *never* seen is the messy pieces of that broken egg dropped again, only to turn back into an egg. Reality just doesn't work that way.

A fundamental law of our natural world, at least our fallen natural world, is that objects tend toward decay, toward disorder. What do things left alone do—increase in energy, order, and structure, or decrease in energy, decay, and move toward disorder? The answer is obvious. We see it all around us and even in ourselves (for instance, our aging bodies).

A lot of complicated science goes into explaining this phenomenon, but you don't need a PhD in physics to see it. To quote a text from an earlier lesson, “And the earth shall wax old like a garment” (*Isa. 51:6*).

And yet, amid all this, we have the gospel, the plan of salvation, which at its core is about restoration, about taking the old, the broken, and the decaying and making it new.

This final week, we'll look at some special clothing imagery from the Scriptures that reveals these promises of renewal and restoration.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 25.*

Heirs According to the Promise

One of the great struggles of the Christian church from the earliest days, a struggle that was at the heart of the Protestant Reformation (and one that continues in various ways today, even in our church), deals with the question of the gospel, of salvation, of how we are saved. Paul, with the church in Galatia, had to deal squarely and directly with the issue, where false theology had crept in and threatened the integrity of the gospel itself.

Read Galatians 3:26–29. What is the main point that Paul is making? (As you read, note that the Greek word translated as “put on” comes from the word meaning “to be clothed.”)

In verse 27, Paul says that all those who have been baptized “have clothed yourselves with Christ” (*NIV*). Although all were sinners, their sins had been washed away, their old filthy garments were gone, and they were now “clothed,” covered in the righteousness of Jesus. His life, His perfection, and His character, they can now claim as their own. All the covenant promises have been fulfilled in Jesus, and now, clothed in Christ, they can claim those promises for themselves. They are heirs of the promise first made to Abraham (*Gen. 12:2, 3*), not because of status, gender, or nationality but only through faith in Christ.

Read Romans 6:1–6. What is Paul saying that should help us to understand what it means to be “clothed” in Christ?

Being clothed in Christ is more than just a legal standing with God. Christians are united with Christ; they are surrendered to Him; and through Him they are being renewed, rejuvenated, and restored. Christians who refuse to change their old ways, their old habits, and their old lifestyle, need to look in the mirror at what they are really clothed in.

What are you wearing? Is what you wear in public different from what you wear when no one (you think) is watching? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Romans 13:14*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize what being “clothed in Christ” means in terms of our legal status before God, our daily spiritual life, and our future bodily state.

Feel: Long to be clothed in Christ as a daily necessity, dying in Him, living His life, and being transformed into His likeness.

Do: Put on the body of Christ, our minds and behavior transformed into God’s likeness.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Legally, Morally, and Physically Changed

A How does being “clothed in Christ” change us instantly, as well as over time?

B When will Christ transform our mortal bodies into immortal ones?

C What are the relationships between the metaphors of baptism, dying and being raised in Christ, and being clothed in Christ?

II. Feel: Longing to Be Clothed

A How are our longings to be clothed in “our heavenly dwelling” (*2 Cor. 5:4, NIV*) fulfilled through Christ’s provisions, both now and when He comes again?

III. Do: In the Likeness of God

A What must we do to put on the body of Christ?

B What behavioral changes will be apparent in our lives as we live His life, rather than ours?

► **Summary:** To be clothed in Christ means not only that God sees us as justified and righteous now, but that as we daily live Christ’s life instead of our own, we are daily remade into God’s likeness. Finally, when Jesus comes again, we will put on the glorious, new immortal body that He will provide for His redeemed.

No Provision for the Flesh

For all of Paul's deep and complicated theology, he also can be very practical. Any theology, any version of the "gospel" that focuses solely on salvation in cold and legal terms misses the point. Christianity is all about Jesus, but it's not about Jesus in isolation. It's about Jesus and what He has done for our fallen race through His life, death, and High Priestly ministry. It's not just about a change in our legal status before God; it's about a change, a renewal, a new birth in us; it's about a new life in Christ.

Read Romans 13. Focus on the daily, practical points that Paul is dealing with here for those who are Christians.

Most of the chapter deals with, in many ways, that which could be considered being a good citizen and a good neighbor. It's a reiteration of the principles of the law, culminating in the famous words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (*vs. 9*).

In verses 11–14, however, the tone somewhat shifts. Paul begins the chapter by talking about obedience to the present political powers, and then he shifts to an emphasis on the "lateness" of the time. The idea being that, considering the times in which the Romans were living, they needed to get serious about their conduct. At the end of the chapter, we have the phrase "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ" (*vs. 14, NIV*), which uses the same Greek root found in Galatians 3:27. Thus, both verses are saying similar things.

The context here in Romans 13 makes it clear what Paul basically means. The verses that come before, and the rest of the verse following the phrase itself, show that being clothed in Christ means living a life of faith and obedience. The same Greek root for "clothed" appears in verse 12, as well, in the context of donning the "armour of light." Christ is the light of the world; those who walk in Him don't walk in darkness. They have "cast off the works of darkness" and now walk in light. Whatever else it means to "be clothed" in Christ, it certainly deals with character building, with conduct, with loving as Christ loved, and with reflecting His image. In a sense, while all things around us tend to get worse, those clothed in Christ should be getting better and better (*see 2 Cor. 3:18*).

How different would your life be if you were fully clothed in Christ? That is, what parts of your life have you held back from the kind of surrender and death to self needed in order for the Lord to work in you? How would your life differ if you made that complete surrender?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: A relationship with God is not about mere information. It must be about transformation, which is an ongoing experience in the Christian’s life. The life of the Christian will be made complete only when the Christian is fully transformed at the Second Coming.

Just for Teachers: Be prepared to suggest, show, and share some of the examples of images and stories of transformation from your culture. Look especially for current stories in the news with which class members will be familiar and able to recognize. Possible examples include:

- Stories and folk tales—well-known folk tales such as Cinderella; stories of rebirth in mythologies of many cultures; before-and-after images used in advertising.
- TV programs or formats—reality TV makeover programs; game shows offering “life-changing” prizes; TV or movie dramas that retell the fairy-tale formulas.
- Social and sports heroes—the stories of the “overnight success” of entertainment stars; people who become instant heroes by a game-winning play for their sports team.

Ask class members what these stories have in common and why they think we are attracted to stories of transformation.

Opening Activity: Discuss images, symbols, and stories of transformation in your culture. These could come from mythical stories and fairy tales, television, or even the way heroes are created in our society, sometimes in a legendary moment in a sports or entertainment context. Share your thoughts about why so many of us are attracted to stories of transformation, whether in our traditional stories, current events, entertainment, or sports.

Discuss: How important is transformation to a good story, and why? If you were offered the opportunity to transform your life in one of the ways discussed above, what would you choose?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

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Putting Off, Putting On

Read Colossians 3:1–10. Keep in mind that in verse 10, the verb *to put on* is from the same verb *to be clothed* that appeared in the previous verses we have studied. With that in mind, what are these verses saying to us?

Scholars see in these verses, as in some of the other ones we've looked at, references to the idea of baptism. (Where in the texts do you see a hint of that?) In no uncertain terms we are shown again the idea of renewal, of regeneration, of something made better than it was before. In Christ we are no longer the same people we once were, living as we once did. Here, too, Paul is very clear to link what we experience of Christ now with what we will experience when He returns. Indeed, how we respond to Christ's first coming will decide what happens to us at His second coming!

Read Ephesians 4:22–24 (yes, the Greek verb in verse 24 is *to clothe*). What point is Paul stressing here?

Notice the contrast between the “old man” and the “new man.” In principle, the old man, the former self, has died (symbolized by baptism), and a new man, a new creation in Christ, results. Here, too, the idea of being “clothed,” either in Christ or in the new man, arises in the context of Christian behavior. Read the verses that come before and after. We are dealing with a transformation of character, of actions, of a person's whole moral being. This motif, this idea, keeps recurring. As baptized Christians, we are new people in the Lord; to be clothed in Christ isn't a metaphor for justification only, for Christ's righteousness covering our sins and giving us a new legal standing before God. Being clothed in Christ means becoming a new person, one “created in righteousness and true holiness” (*Eph. 4:24*).

Go back over the verses for today, looking at specific commands regarding behavior. In what areas do you need change? If you are struggling, why not seek out someone you trust and ask for help in your attempts to better live out the principles taught in Scripture?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Bible Commentary****I. A Subversive Choice—a New Life** (*Review Romans 6:1–6 with your class.*)

In *A Peculiar People*, Rodney Clapp refers to Paul’s description of “a new life begun” (*see 2 Cor. 5:17*) and describes baptism as an act of civil disobedience. The family, the nation, the market, the employer, the university, the advertiser, the retailer, the opinion-maker are “no longer the primary source of identity, support and growth” for the new believer. As such, Clapp argues, “baptism is profoundly subversive. Anytime the church takes baptism seriously, which is to say on its own terms, the surrounding society cannot help but see it as at least potentially politically threatening” (p. 100).

Clapp isn’t focused on “political” in the “politician” sense that we see in a capital city, election campaign, or media debate. Instead, he is highlighting the real sense whereby to say “Jesus is Lord” is also a powerful statement that everything and everyone else is not Lord. To choose baptism is to choose citizenship in a different kingdom—and a different kind of life.

Living out of step with the dominant society—creatively and with grace—is not necessarily easy. But that is the call of God, answered at the time of our own baptism and renewed with each baptism we share: “For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives” (*Rom. 6:4, NLT*).

Consider This: What do you think of this view of baptism?

■ *How important do you consider baptism to being transformed in Christ?*

II. A Life Transformed (*Review Romans 13 with your class.*)

In his short novel, *Life After God*, Douglas Coupland has one of his characters reflect on the real need all of us have to be transformed: “My secret is that I need God—that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love.”—Page 359.

Life with God must make a difference to our lives, priorities, and actions—and we need Him to make that difference in our lives.

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In the Twinkling of an Eye

No question, to be clothed in Christ is to become a new person in Jesus. It is to be restored, at least somewhat, into “the image of the One who created him” (*Col. 3:10, NASB*). Untold numbers of lives have borne, and still today bear, testimony to the reality of what the Lord has done in and for them. Many of our own lives, regardless of our faults, struggles, and falls, witness to the reality of what it means to be clothed in Jesus.

Yet, let’s be honest. If what Christ did for us ended with this life here, in the end—whether we are clothed in Christ or not clothed in Christ—the grave would still await us. Many have suffered a great deal in this life for Jesus and for their faith. Whatever the immediate rewards, what are these rewards, what *could* they be, in contrast to the real reward awaiting us at the Second Coming?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:49–55. What great hope is presented here? As you read the text, guess which words come from the same Greek root we’ve seen all week, “to clothe” or “to be clothed.”

In verses 53 and 54, the verb (often translated “clothed”) is the same one we’ve already seen. Here, however, the apostle takes it to a whole new level. Being clothed in Christ doesn’t mean only to bear the moral image of Jesus, to reflect His character, and to live out the principles that He taught us. In other words, it’s not just a legal change, not just a moral change: it also will include a radical *physical* change. Our mortal flesh, our aching and hurting and dying flesh, will be clothed with the same kind of immortal body that the resurrected Jesus had. Talk about a change of clothing, talk about wearing a new garment! That’s the ultimate hope that awaits us, the only hope that really makes our faith worthwhile (*see 1 Cor. 15:12–19*).

Most of us (particularly as we age) realize the frailty and untrustworthiness of our flesh. If we don’t yet see that frailty in ourselves, we can see it in others. Think about the hope we have in Jesus, as revealed in these verses. What could this world offer, in any *conceivable* manner, that would make it worth losing the promise revealed here?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Too often, evangelism has focused only on getting people to the point of decision and baptism. But Jesus instructed that we were to make disciples (*see Matt. 28:20*). Discipleship and spiritual transformation must be an ongoing part of our faith experience. Spiritual practices are part of our continuing growth in Christ.

Consider This: In what aspect of your life do you particularly feel your need for God, and why?

■ *What are some of the spiritual practices that can aid our continued spiritual transformation?*

III. The Ultimate Transformation (*Review 1 Corinthians 15:49–55 with your class.*)

Jesus saves us in the moment that we accept what He did for us by His death. We do not have to achieve a certain level of behavior to claim that gift (consider the story of the thief on the cross in Luke 23:40–43). But God does not leave us where He finds us. He promises that we will be changed—transformed—and that, ultimately, we will be given a completely new and eternal kind of life when He returns.

Paul bases his excitement about this ultimate transformation on the assurance of Jesus' resurrection. If Jesus was raised to a new kind of life—and He was, Paul urges—we will be too. Looking forward, Paul anticipated the time when we will all share in that same newness of life completely and eternally: “We will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown” (*1 Cor. 15:51, 52, NLT*).

Consider This: How can we be assured of salvation today?

■ *How does God's promise to transform us “in the blink of an eye” at the Second Coming change your attitude toward life?*

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Our experience of transformation is not just a spiritual thing, it is linked to specific occasions, events, decisions, and practices in our lives. Among others, baptism is one significant milestone event. Reminding ourselves of that time in our lives is valuable in reaffirming our commitments and refocusing on our need for continued

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Our Heavenly Dwelling

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1–4. What is Paul telling us here? What hope is again presented? How does clothing imagery fit in?

As long as we are in this world, in this body, in this “house,” we are going to “groan” (from a word that means also “to sigh deeply”). Who hasn’t groaned while in our “earthly dwelling,” which is our present body? Look at the chapter that comes before (*1 Corinthians 4*), which speaks of the woe that followers of Jesus have encountered in this existence. It’s after this recitation that Paul goes into the verses for today.

Sure, we groan, we suffer, and we die, but that’s not the whole story. We have the promise of being clothed in “our heavenly dwelling.”

What two metaphors, or images, does Paul use in these verses to depict our present situation and the hope that awaits us?

In some ancient writings, the idea of being clothed was seen as similar to being inside a house. Both are external to us, and both present a certain amount of protection and covering (in Paul’s time, the name of the garment worn by the poorer class came from a word that meant “little house”). Whatever the reasons, Paul uses different images to contrast a few basic ideas—a temporal earthly dwelling in contrast to an eternal heavenly one; being naked in contrast to being clothed; and mortality (the certainty of death) in contrast to life, eternal life in Christ. In the end, all of these metaphors are talking about the same thing: the hope that we have, at Christ’s return, of being clothed or housed in immortal bodies. In other words, these verses (2 Corinthians 5:1–4) are another way of expressing the promise of eternal life that we have in Jesus.

Think about death, about the apparent finality of it. Without hope of something beyond it, what hope is there for any of us? Dwell on all of the reasons that we have for our hope that death doesn’t have the final say. Bring your answers to class and discuss them there.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

transformation. Sharing these stories with others can be similarly faith affirming. Invite class members to share their stories, but in a way that is sensitive to those in the class who may not yet be baptized.

Activity: Remember your baptism: What was the experience that led to that choice? Where and when were you baptized? What were the circumstances in which you were baptized? How has your Christian experience grown and continued to be transformed since that time? Share this story with other class members, even sharing photos of the event, if available. When as many class members as possible have shared their stories, pray together, affirming those decisions and commitments made at earlier times in their respective lives.

Thought Questions:

- ➊ How would you explain to a non-Christian friend the idea of “transformation” as discussed in this week’s study?
- ➋ How do you measure your own spiritual growth?
- ➌ By anticipating our ultimate transformation at the Second Coming, do we conclude that because we will not attain “perfection” until that time, it is not worth focusing on spiritual practices? Why or why not? How do we balance striving to live faithfully with recognizing our present and ongoing human shortcomings?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: Transformation is something we experience in small ways every day and something we can share with others; but these are just glimpses of the transformation God offers us. We should look for ways to recognize this kind of transformation in our daily lives, and seek ways to share this intentionally with others in our communities.

Individual Activities: Try to describe to a friend, verbally or in writing, the feelings you experience in one or more of the following situations:

- ➊ *After a day of work when you bathe and put on clean clothing:* How do you describe the feeling of being renewed and refreshed?
- ➋ *When you notice spring begin to change the natural environment around you:* What does it mean to see the world around us being transformed in this way?

Further Study: “The Controversy Ended,” p. 665, in *The Great Controversy*.

“All will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving—the robe of Christ’s righteousness. All nature in its surpassing loveliness will offer to God a constant tribute of praise and adoration. The world will be bathed in the light of heaven. The years will move on in gladness. The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold greater than it is now. Over the scene the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy, while God and Christ will unite in proclaiming, ‘There shall be no more sin, neither shall there be any more death.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 348.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As a class, go over your answers to Thursday’s final question. How can you help each other to find hope in this wonderful promise? How can you help those who might find themselves struggling with doubt?
- ② So often in our day and age, people have placed so much hope in science. Many have seen science as the only way of coming to know truth and as the only hope of humankind. Dwell on why that’s such a false hope, especially in the context of the last few days’ lessons. What hope can science offer us for the greatest problem we face—death? Why must our hope be in something “supernatural,” as depicted in those promises?
- ③ Think about Paul’s question in Romans 7:24, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (a reference to a punishment of the time, when a criminal had to wear a dead body chained to his body). What answer do we have that all the world’s wisdom cannot supply?
- ④ Dwell more on what it means to be “clothed” in Christ in terms of how we are to live. Think through how you are living—your practices, your habits, your thoughts, your attitudes toward others, and so forth. How well do you reflect the reality of Christ in these areas? Although we all struggle with cultivated and inherited tendencies toward sin, what overt and conscious choices can you make that would go a long way in helping you to live as you know you should? Also, how can we help each other, as a community, to live out the biblical ideals presented before us?