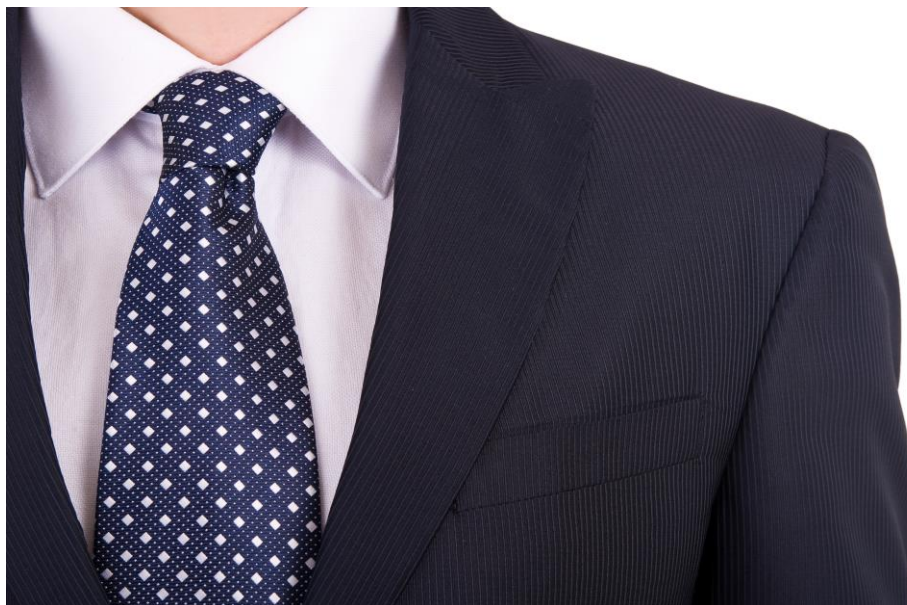


# WHAT WE WEAR IS IMPORTANT

*By John Gagliardi*



“Clothes maketh the man”, it has been said – and on two levels, it is quite a true statement.

Physically, Kingdom business professionals should dress well and fashionably, if not ostentatiously, and present a dignified and confident external appearance to the world. God wants His people to look good, feel good and of course, do good.

Clothes and general grooming form a large part of the impression people get when they meet us, and as the old saying goes, “you don’t get a second chance at a first impression.”

But clothing is also important on a spiritual level, as I have discovered by a long and meandering look at clothing throughout the Bible. It is a fascinating and rich topic, with many symbolic allusions and metaphors.

Three quick examples:

- sackcloth (a rough material made of goat’s or camel’s hair) represents mourning;
- linen, clean and white, represents holiness, righteousness and divinity; and
- animal skins are associated with sacrificial death.

Israelites throughout the Bible tore or “rent” their clothes to demonstrate anger or extreme sadness, although the prophet Joel isn’t impressed with such outward shows: “So rend your heart, and not your garments.” (Joel 2: 13)

The various priestly garments and their appurtenances are another rich source of study. Mostly made of linen, they include the breeches, tunic, girdle, robe, ephod, breastpiece, turban and the

Page | 1

gold plate or diadem. Even the colours – blue, white, purple, scarlet and gold - were also highly symbolic, as were the tassels, bells and pomegranates around the outer hem.

Clothing in the Bible also can symbolize authority or special powers, as with the mantle of Elijah. Elijah and Elisha both used the mantle to split the Jordan, and when Elijah appointed Elisha as his successor, he did it by casting his mantle upon him. (1 Kings 19: 19; 2 Kings 2: 8)

In the New Testament, the woman with the issue of blood was healed when she just touched the hem of Jesus' garment, (Matthew 9: 20-22), while God even used "handkerchiefs and aprons" brought from Paul's body to heal the sick and cast out demons. (Acts 19: 12)

Physical clothing, of course, has a somewhat curious origin – in the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve wore no clothes, and had no sense of nakedness or shame. But after the serpent made his wily appearance, and tempted them to rebel and eat the forbidden fruit, everything suddenly changed, and they suddenly became self-aware and embarrassed about their nakedness.

For the first time, mankind felt fear and anxiety, and their first response was to "cover up" (so what's new?). When God calls to Adam, his response was: "I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." (Genesis 3: 10). Stitching some fig leaves together as "aprons" to cover their loin area, they thought they had fixed the problem. But not so – God was unimpressed by their figleaf "bikinis" and dressed them in animal skins.

Interestingly, figs and fig leaves are often seen as symbolic of Israel's religious life, while animal skins represent blood sacrifice. The message is clear – fig leaves weren't enough, God clothed them in animal skins. So religion won't save us - we have to rely on the shed blood of Jesus for salvation. It was sin that first separated man from God, and it was sin that led to man wearing his first set of clothes.

So – next time you put on that swish Armani suit or that glamorous Dior gown, remember how clothes got started in the first place. If our first ancestors hadn't sinned, we might still be running around naked, as the Bible says: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed." (Genesis 2: 25)

But perhaps that's enough on the physical aspect of clothing – let's move up to an altogether higher level, where God uses "clothing" as a metaphor for the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit.

In the Book of Judges, where the English translation says, "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon" (Judges 6: 34), the Hebrew word is "labash", which means "to clothe oneself or another, wear, put on a garment". So in the original, it was more like: "The Holy Spirit clothed Gideon with Himself".

In other words, Gideon went into battle actually wearing the Holy Spirit as his clothing! No wonder he and his little band of 300 could wipe the floor with the Midianites and the Amalekites and "all the people of the east, as numerous as locusts." (Judged 7: 12).

It is curious that later in the same Book, the Spirit of the Lord “came mightily” upon Samson too (Judges 14: 5 and 19), but two different Hebrew words are used, with a quite different meaning. They are “al” and “tsalach”, with the sense of falling upon, then sending or pushing forward. In these words there is none of the intimate warmth as the Holy Spirit “clothed” Gideon, God’s obedient “mighty man of valour.” (Judges 6: 12).

Because of his faith and obedience (except for his strange “fleece” episode in Judges 6: 37-40), Gideon had a supportive and intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit. Samson, on the other hand, who was anointed but rebellious and driven by lust, seemed to get more like a divine “shove” in the back.

You can be symbolically “clothed” with all sorts of things in the Bible, ranging all the way from salvation and humility, to shame and vengeance:

- Let Your priests, O God, be *clothed* with salvation (2 Chronicles 6: 41)
- Let them be *clothed* with shame and dishonour, who exalt themselves against Me (Psalm 35: 26)
- I put on righteousness, and it *clothed* me (Job 29: 14)
- Let my accusers be *clothed* with shame (Psalm 109: 29)
- Let Your priests be *clothed* with righteousness (Psalm 132: 9)
- He has *clothed* me with the garments of salvation (Isaiah 61: 10)
- The prince will be *clothed* with desolation (Ezekiel 7: 27)
- He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for *clothing*, and was clad with zeal as a cloak (Isaiah 59: 17)
- Be submissive to one another, and be *clothed* with humility (1 Peter 5:5)
- Another mighty angel coming down from heaven, *clothed* with a cloud (Revelation 10: 1)
- A woman *clothed* with the sun (Revelation 12: 1).

Wolves, we discover, can appear in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7: 15), while the virtuous wife in Proverbs 31: 22 is clothed in “fine linen and purple.”

John the Baptist, with a harsh message of repentance and retribution (“Brood of vipers ... even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees” – Luke 3: 7, 9) wears camel’s hair and a leather belt, symbolising sacrifice and mourning. Jesus, on the other hand, was wrapped in fine linen (Mark 15: 46) and “He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood ... and the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.” (Revelation 19: 13 and 14).

We Christians are told several times in the Bible to put on special symbolic garments, most notably in Ephesians, where Paul says the way to be strong in the Lord is to “Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (Ephesians 6: 10 and 11).

It is my strong personal belief that all Christians involved in spiritual warfare (and that should be all of us) should every day – out loud – declare Ephesians 6: 3-18, making sure the devil hears it! Tell the devil every day that you are wearing the whole armour of God:

- The strong belt of truth
- The breastplate of righteousness
- The shoes of the preparation of the Gospel of Peace

- The shield of faith
- The helmet of salvation

And with the defensive armour in place, we grab hold of the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.”

For Satan, that’s going to be a scary sight – what he will see, will be a well-defended and dangerous warrior of God, ready to do battle. The devil will see us also covered in the “armour of light” – a dazzling display of power and holiness, that is blinding to our spiritual enemies (Romans 13: 12). Paul also talks about the “unapproachable light” that surrounds Jesus. (1 Timothy 6: 16)

Jesus, just before His ascension, told His disciples to “tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24: 49). The “power” He was talking about was the Holy Spirit, Who came on the Day of Pentecost, but what is interesting is that the English word “endued” here is the Greek word “enduo”, which means literally “to invest with clothing, to clothe, array, put on”. In other words, He is saying: “tarry ... until you are clothed with the Holy Spirit.”

But not only can we be clothed with the whole armour of God, “unapproachable light” and the Holy Spirit, it just keeps getting better. We are also told, “Put on (clothe yourself with) the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 13: 14)

No wonder we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37), the head and not the tail, above only and not beneath (Deuteronomy 28: 13), and we have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15: 57)

Kingdom business professionals – Christian business people – are out there fighting in the trenches of commerce, battling the enemy every day come rain or shine. It is not always easy or pleasant. We are in (but not of, hallelujah!) a dirty, dishonest and depraved arena called the marketplace. There, the people we mix with are “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of God.” (2 Timothy 3: 2 and 3)

But as we “shout unto God with the voice of triumph” (Psalm 47: 1) we know that we are called to be lights in the darkness, and that with the armour of light – the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ – clothing us, we will do our part to usher in the Kingdom of God in all its fullness.