

Nearly from the beginning, guilt and shame have been universal human problems. We feel the need to justify ourselves and to hide our sins because our hearts testify we are guilty and ashamed. But nothing we do removes the stain. Only God can give us the righteousness and covering we desperately need.

Introduction – How are righteousness and nakedness related in your life? Do you desire, even yearn for, someone who knows and loves the real you? Of course you do. Everyone does. It's a human longing common to all of us. So why don't you ever put your "nakedness" on display, as it were, fishing for someone out there who might come to know and love the real you? Could it be that your righteousness—that which you hope makes you not just likeable but loveable to others and to God—does not adequately cover your nakedness?

I. The Memory of Nakedness

A. We were known and loved (vv. 2:18-24)

1. By God. Creation was not complete, and God knew the man was lonely and incomplete. For God so loved the man, that he gave his only woman, that whosoever doubts that God knows what he's doing, should let the thought perish and give thanks for the spice of life! Rejoice how God proves his knowledge of and love for you by giving you exactly what you need.

2. By another who corresponds to you. One who is like you, unlike you, and who is for you. The Bible pictures this relationship in a general sense as friendship, but in the most intimate sense as husband and wife. Righteous nakedness in marriage is the capstone gift in Genesis 2. In marriage we are known and loved.

B. We were not ashamed (v. 2:25)

Naked and unashamed—how we long for these two states to be together again! The memory of those almost forgotten days from another era—expressed in untold ways by poets, artists, storytellers, and songwriters—tugs at our hearts. Today we fear nakedness, but there was once a time when it signified innocence, integrity, even righteousness. Believe it (cf. Song 1)! There was a time when nakedness was not associated with exploitation, vulnerability, exposure. It was "very good" (Gen 1:31).

II. The Experience of Nakedness

A. We feel guilt and shame (vv. 3:1-7, 16-19)

Here is the Bible's account of the first sin, sometimes called the Fall because of its devastating effects on humanity and the rest of creation. This first sin's results were cosmic in scope, introducing the misery of guilt and shame to the human heart. If guilt says "I deserve punishment" then shame says "I am worthless." How do we experience nakedness? If you trace the steps that led to the first sin, you'll see how we also bring guilt and shame on ourselves. Genesis 3 teaches us when people are morally culpable for sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, they bring upon themselves guilt and shame.

B. So we hide and blame (vv. 3:8-13)

Our makeshift coverings hide and alienate us from God, other people, and our true selves. When the LORD arrived in the garden he called out to them, inviting them to confess and come out of hiding. But

instead of repenting, Adam and Eve shifted the blame. Instead of confession and repentance, we choose to hide from and blame each other. And then we hide from and blame God for the shame we feel. Don't you see when you hide and blame to escape your guilt and shame, you're choosing to live in the no-man's-land gap between righteousness and nakedness? The Bible portrays shocking images of the righteousness-nakedness gap in the fallen world (Isa 20; Lam 1; Ezek 16:8, 15, 37-39; Heb 4:13). We run for cover but never find it, all the while God calls us to come to him for covering, cleansing, and acceptance.

III. The Covering for Nakedness

A. We can be fully known and loved (vv. 3:14-15, 20)

1. Because of his love for you, God restores your dignity, delivers you from your enemies, and brings you to himself. Look how the LORD shared the gospel for the first time with us. It's in the form of a curse for Satan and his people and a blessing for Eve and her people. Even though Eve had rebelled against God and allied with Satan, now God would bring her back to himself by guaranteeing perpetual conflict between Eve and her enemy Satan, and also between her children and Satan's children. This war between the serpent's "seed" and the woman's "seed" will culminate in God delivering us through the true Seed from all his and our enemies (Mt 1:23; Gal 4:3-5; Rom 16:20; Heb 2:14; cf. WSC 26).

2. Jesus Christ (the Son of God born of the virgin Mary) and Satan (the serpent) would eventually go head to head in battle. Satan would crush Christ's heel, but Jesus would crush Satan's head. Why did God do this for his guilty and shameful children—you and me and all his church? Because he knows us and loves us, despite our guilt and shame. He won't allow us to suffer forever the miseries of sin. In sending his one and only Son, born in the likeness of human flesh, Jesus was made like you and me in every way so he might perfectly identify with us and perfectly save us (Heb 2:17-18).

B. We can be fully covered by God's clothing (v. 3:21)

1. God's clothing is infinitely better than a make-shift fig leaf skirt which can never adequately cover your nakedness. The clothes God provides cover and cleanse. The garments of skin that God made for Adam and Eve are a reminder of the Fall and the gospel. Of the Fall: that humanity is separated from God—a separation marked by loss of innocence, original righteousness, and nakedness unashamed. Of the gospel: that God will provide the necessary covering for humanity's sin, guilt, and shame. Those primitive garments anticipated the OT animal sacrifices for the covering and cleansing of sin, guilt, and shame (Lev 1, 3-7; 17:11; cf. Heb 9:22). And the sacrifices pointed forward to the NT when the blood of Christ accomplished final covering and cleansing to make the naked righteous once again in God's sight (Rom 5:8-10).

2. Here's the amazing thing. The righteousness that Christ provides us does not make us naked and unashamed again. The righteousness that Christ provides is better than the original, innocent, fallible righteousness of Adam and Eve. The righteousness of Christ is final, tested, and infallible. Instead of uncovering the guilty and shameful, it covers in robes washed in the cleansing blood of Christ's perfect sacrifice. So if you are covered in the righteousness of Christ, you are fully covered by God's clothing (Ps 132:9; Isa 61:10; 2 Cor 5:1-5; Eph 6:13-14).

Conclusion – Only by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ and his righteousness can you be covered, cleansed, and accepted. So whenever guilt and shame threaten to undo you, put on the righteous robes of

Christ (Rom 13:12-14; Eph 4:24; 1 Thess 5:8-10; Rev 7:14; 22:14). If you have brought guilt and shame on yourself by your own sin, first confess and repent, and then claim the covering, cleansing, and acceptance that belong to you by your union with Christ through faith. If you feel naked and ashamed because of something done to you, or something associated with you, then remind yourself that Jesus has crushed the serpent's head, and you are fully known, loved, accepted and covered by Christ. Guilt and shame no longer have a grip on the Christian. [Verses 1-2 of the hymn "Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness"]