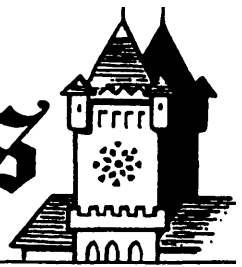


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STUDIES IN BAPTISM

by Ray Sutton

No. 11: Baptism and Nakedness

And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed (Gen. 2:25).. They knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together (Gen. 3:7) .../ counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear (Rev. 3:18).. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27) . . . And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:24).

Since the fall, sinful man has been preoccupied with nakedness and clothing. Prior to original sin he was naked, but not ashamed. Afterward, nudity aroused shame, and man tried to cover his exposure in the presence of God. Thus, fig leaves are the proto-type of all human efforts to hide sin. But human clothing alone was not satisfactory. History tells how man repeatedly attempts to overcome this dissatisfaction by recreating a naked world without sin, or clothing man with something other than Christ.

We have previously seen baptism as the initial clothing rite where Christ is put on. And the kind of clothing is priestly and kingly. In this essay we turn our attention to that which is covered, nakedness. After all, man comes to baptism naked, and leaves with new clothing. It is part of man's sinful condition met at that point. So, to understand baptism's clothing function better, we must concentrate on the Biblical meaning and theology of nakedness. Then we can apply our insights to areas of concern in the world and church.

The Old Testament uses primarily one word to indicate nakedness, but it has a variety of usage. The original word is used to mean *poured*, as with reference to the Holy Spirit (Isa. 32:15), the *emptying* of a pitcher (Gen. 24:20), the *spreading* of a green bay tree (Ps. 37:35), and *nakedness*. The common-denominator among these uses is the idea of exposure. Thus, prior to the fall, man could be exposed to man without shame. Subsequently, such exposure tends to arouse sinful lust or ridicule (Gen. 9:22 ff.). The basic meaning, then, is to expose either in a positive light as in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, or in the negative sense of disrobing a relative (Lev. 18:6ff.).

The New Testament has the same meaning in view. On the cross, Christ was naked, indicating that he was exposed to open shame (Ps. 22). In Laodicea, the church thought it was rich and clothed with fine raiment (Rev. 3:17), but before Christ they were naked. He could see that they were blind, and tells them to put on eye ointment (v. 18). Thus, both testaments refer to nakedness as exposure. But specifically, it is exposure to shame. This carries us into the Biblical-theological meaning of nakedness.

Shame first appears in connection with nakedness in Genesis 2:25. But Moses says, *And the man and the woman were naked and were not ashamed. Originally, nakedness and shame did not go together. Genesis three, however, shows man and woman experiencing shame for the first time. We know of their shame from two actions — running from God, and hiding their genitals with fig leaves. The later act focuses shame and nakedness, therefore, in man's "flesh", that is, his reproductive organs (Lev. 15:2; Gen. 17:24ff.; Cot. 2:1 1). This is determinative of the meaning and significance of shame, so we must seek to find out the relationship between this act of covering the genitals and shame.*

Chapter five of Genesis says, *This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image (verses 1-3).* Notice the parallel between God's creation of man, and man's reproduction of himself. Thus, the image of God is focused in reproductive capacity. This must not be understood as the act only, for reproduction stands for much more. It represents man's seed, and the entire civilization-culture that Adam would have built, if it were not for sin. He was to do this by *being fruitful, multiplying, and subduing the earth (Gen. 1:28).* Thus, the reproductive processes of man were a primary means of building God's garden-civilization before the fall. And the genitals portray what man could have done through natural generation.

But after the fall, his seed is destructive. His reproductive capacity brings the world to virtual destruction. Genesis develops this scenario several times, but the most striking scene is in Genesis six. Illicit sexual behavior and relationships so anger God that He is ready to undo creation. Thus, man begins to see that he can never be fruitful and multiply through natural generation. And when man is exposed after the fall, he is reminded of his failure. Adam reflected the image of God when he reproduced Seth, but he also spawned the line of Cain. In Cain, Adam was naked and ashamed, seeing in him a counter civilization

—one which has come from his loins. In Seth, however, he, was clothed with God's skins and unashamed.

In this context, we can begin to relate the refreshing significance of baptism as a clothing ritual. As a sign of the gospel, it stands in contrast to all of man's natural attempts. First, his fig leaves represent a natural effort apart from grace. But when sin enters the world, man discovers that these attempts to cover sin do not work. Baptism is the polar opposite of fig leaves in that it speaks of salvation as coming from the hand of God. Like the animal skins He provided, it is called clothing in Galatians 3:27.

Second, in a state of nakedness, man's environment suddenly became hostile. His fig-leaf clothing served as a temporary buffer, but his work-mandate was severely hindered. Baptism is the picture and pledge that God's clothing not only removes man's hostility with his environment, it enables him to carry out God's work. Third, man's fig leaves serve as his claim to God that he can build the world without his Creator, and thereby they become a disclaimer of God's provision. Baptism is the opposite. It is God's claim which functions as a disclaimer to the work of man.

Finally, man's attempts to clothe himself are illuminating. Power, fame, and fortune are only a few of the ways he attempts to seize what we see in the sign and seal of baptism. But modern intellectual man epitomizes the endless frustration of pagan efforts. His psychological methodologies attempt to manufacture more and more fig leaves. But another sector of humanistic thought, existentialism, has observed that the more man seeks to mask himself, the more his agony intensifies. On the other hand, to take his clothing off leaves him exposed without any means of atonement, true or false. So, he struggles to put more humanistic clothing on, only to be weighed down in more misery. This is man's dilemma. He needs the clothing that only Christ can give. Baptism is the definitive point where we put on Christ, and were robed with God's garment, the righteousness of Christ. Moreover, it is His claim telling us we were *not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God* (John 1:13).

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

by Gary North

No. 12: The Light of the Law

My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother. Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life (Pr. 6:20-23).

The author identifies his own judgment with wisdom and the law. The early sections of Proverbs are focused on this theme: the importance of biblical wisdom, which is actually personified (Pr. 8), and equated with God, the source of life: "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death" (8:36).

By making this identification, and including his wife's law, the author asserts that it is possible for men to act as the legal representatives of God to their children. The

parents come in the name of God, imparting His wisdom to their children. They bear lawful authority, and they have access to God's standards of righteous living.

It is a constant complaint against Christianity in our age that "No one knows the will of God." This is used by relativists as a justification of opposing all civil law (anarchism), especially in sexual matters, or as a justification of the rejection of all Bible-based opposition to the civil law (statism). There is no law of God to infringe on man, either as an autonomous individual (anarchism) or as a collective species (statism). Because God is "wholly other," He cannot communicate with man; therefore, no man is morally or legally bound to impose the terms of God's law on anyone else. God is so high that he cannot lift man up from sin. God is so pure that man need not strive to match the standards set by God. In short, the relativistic rebel asks, "Hath God said, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy' (Lev. 11:44)?" And he answers his own question: "No; God says, 'Be ye unholy, for I alone am holy.'"

The author of Proverbs categorically rejects such argumentation. A parent who has personally mastered the law of God does have access to part of the mind of God. (Paul writes: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ" [1 Cor. 2:16].) The law of God is a revelation of God which is not the special wisdom of a closed priesthood. It is to be proclaimed to every citizen. In Israel, it was read every seventh year to the assembly of the people (Deut. 31:10-13). Because God holds men responsible for the performance of the terms of the law, He has revealed this aspect of Himself to men. Man is made in the image of God and can therefore receive God's law. The argument that God's mind is too far removed from man's mind is an attempt to deny man's nature as God's image-bearer. It is an assertion of autonomy.

The author tells his son that the law is to be mastered to such an extent that it is always with a person. Its terms are to be indelibly etched into the heart, meaning the deepest recesses of the mind. The law is personified as a constant companion. "When thou goest, it shall go with thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee" (v. 22). When men think to themselves, their answers should be the words of God. The mind is to confront the law at all times. The law is to guide men's thoughts.

Because the law of God guides men's thoughts, it should also guide men's steps. Without the law, men walk in darkness. Like a blind man is he who departs from the law of God. He wanders aimlessly. Worse, he wanders into the pit, or death. The reproofs of the law are "the way of life" (v. 23 b). In other words, to be without the law's correction is to be in the pathway of death.

Is this different from New Testament teaching? Paul writes: "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death" (Rom. 7:9-10). What does this mean? It means exactly what Proverbs teaches: Sin deceives men; the law allows us to see what we are and where we are headed. The law points to our need for regeneration; without it, we perish. But it is the law that serves as our guide. If we did not have its testimony, we would not understand our fallen ethical condition.

To be "alive without the law" means to be ignorantly dead in our sins; it means that we do not understand our

true Spiritual condition. Paul was not saying that he was ethically pure, and therefore the possessor of eternal life, before he read the Mosaic law, for "death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude [likeness] of Adam's transgression" (Rom. 5:14). The Mosaic law "killed" him in the sense that it showed him that he was already Spiritually dead, as a son of Adam. Thus, the law pointed him toward the pathway of life, Jesus Christ,

The law is to be as basic to our decision-making as a light is on a dark night. A man who shines a light on the ground "naturally" steps only into the circle of light. He "naturally" avoids stepping into the darkness. He does not know what dangers lurk in the darkness, so in order to avoid possible dangers, he steps only on the lighted portion of the path.

We know that the very essence of the sin of man is to prefer the spiritual darkness to the light. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). What is really "natural" to fallen man is to *avoid* the lighted ethical pathway. The author of Proverbs therefore counsels his son to regard the ethical light cast by the law as he would regard the visible light cast by a lamp. The law is a "lamp unto our feet." But it takes training to learn to trust the light of the law. This trust is not instinctive in fallen man, which is why the author has given his son the Proverbs.

To keep from getting "tripped up" in life, men must adhere to the terms of Biblical law. To have God's law as your companion is to have a counselor who is looking out for your best interests. To act in terms of the law's counsel is to walk in the pathway of life. *Conforming instinctively* to the law's directing counsel should be like *walking instinctively* in the circle of light. It is our ethical responsibility to become instinctive conformers to the law.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CALENDAR

by James B. Jordan

No. 17: The Sabbath and Debts

"At the end of every seven years there must be a cancellation of debts.. ." (Deuteronomy 15:1a). "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. . . . For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:12, 14, 15).

The cancellation of debts in the sabbath year pertains only to charitable loans given to the poor (Ex. 22:25), and thus implies the release of Christian debt-slaves (Deut. 15:12). There is no reason why the church cannot institute a cycle of sabbath years, declaring 1983 as year one, and demand that all non-interest loans to impoverished church members by other members be cancelled at the beginning of 1990. This aspect of the sabbath year does not pertain to the state, since it applies only to covenant members (Deut. 15:3), and can and should be enforced by the courts of the church.

The cancellation of debts is thus tied to the sabbath. Theologically, all our debts were cancelled at the cross of Christ, because He was the full Reparation Offering for

what we have stolen from God (Lev. 5:14-19). In this sense, the sabbath year has fully come, for there are no more ultimate debts to be paid. As we have seen, however, the fact that the sabbath *day/year* is fulfilled in Christ does not mean that the sabbath *principle* no longer has a periodic (cyclical) application. Practically speaking, it must continue to be applied, for we still live in the first creation, and must labor in terms of its cycles.

The fact that Christ has paid our debts does not justify antinomian living. Salvation came to the house of Zachaeus when he promised fourfold restitution for his thefts (Luke 19). The application of the sabbath principle, however, still stands as a cancellation of such debts as cannot be paid or collected.

When we ask God to forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors, we are using the term 'debt' in a wider sense than a merely economic one. A study of the Reparation Offering in Leviticus 5:14-6:7 indicates that it concerns sins of ignorance (where the sinning party has thought, and may still think, that he is in the right), and relatively secondary offenses. For "sins with a high hand" there was no sacrifice in the Old Covenant (Num. 15:30). Such "debts" as these occur all the time, when someone wrongs us deeply, and we believe they owe us an apology. More to the point, we fully and conscientiously believe that they owe *God* an apology. They, however, seem fully persuaded that they have acted properly, and that they owe nothing either to us or to God.

This is no light matter. Over the centuries Christians have come to beat odds with each other, and maintained hard relations (or no relations at all) for the rest of their lives because they are holding out for an apology that will never come. The sabbath as a cancellation of debts points to the resolution of these horrible conflicts.

The sabbath time occurs periodically on the Lord's Day, or Day of the Lord, the day of judgment. His throne is set up. His Sacrifice is eaten by His people, and thus His judgment is applied to them. The Lord's Day is not, however, the final judgment. There will come a last judgment when all wrongs will be righted, and all perceived wrong dealt with. If we cannot get justice now, the final judgment will take care of it. It is in the light of this that we are to submit to wrong judgments, when rendered by the courts. Indeed, if the court wrongly finds us guilty in a situation, we "must submit, or face the wrath of God (Deut. 17:12-13). There must be a way of clearing the deck in history. History must be allowed to move forward. The last judgment will settle all things. We can afford to wait, without vindictiveness.

The early church held court each week, to settle disputes before the Lord's Day arrived. Jesus had told them to leave their gifts at the altar and settle grievances with brothers before coming to the Lord's Table (Matt. 5:23f.). At the beginning of the Eucharistic service all the men exchanged the kiss of peace with each other, as did the women also (separately), as the Bible indicated should be done (Luke 7:45; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14 — it is truly amazing that something commanded five times in the New Testament should be so universally ignored by the church in our times). It is very difficult to exchange a kiss with a man with whom one is at odds. The kiss of peace is a great psychological inducement to get matters straight before coming to the Lord's Day. Even so, however, it could become perfunctory, so it was necessary for the deacon to

call out during the section of the **service** devoted to the kiss, "Let none keep rancor against any. Let none give the kiss in hypocrisy."

The fact is, of course, that not all grievances are settled. Modern churches have the Lord's Supper only occasionally, and never require anything so difficult as the kiss of peace, so that it is quite easy to let rancor accumulate. Even in the best of situations, however, there comes a time when a matter has been processed through the church court, and one is still unhappy with the way things have fallen out. The sabbath time, occurring on the Lord's Day, can serve as a cancellation of such debts to us. Having done what is required, we can forgive and forget, and let it slide.

Of course, there are other principles as well. Jesus tells us that the man who wrongs us should ask our forgiveness (Luke 17:4), and "this verse is sometimes taken to mean that we are not to grant forgiveness *unless* we get a request for it. On the contrary, however; for in 1 Cor. 6:7 St. Paul enjoins us rather to suffer wrong than to disturb the peace of the church unnecessarily. If it looks as if we cannot get the situation righted, we ought to drop the matter. The sabbath principle enables us to do so.

Some would disagree. They hold that if we are genuinely wronged, we should hold out for justice until death if need be. There are a couple of things badly wrong with such a position. First, it tends to put us in a position of playing God. In the final analysis it is God Who must be satisfied. If the sabbath time comes, and reconciliation has not been effected, then we should forget the matter and leave it in God's hands.

Second, such a position tends to be perfectionistic. It does not reckon with the fact that the maturation of the church is a history-long process. It is not the case that we shall all agree with one another. Some will believe in theonomy; some will not. Some will agree with exclusive psalmody; some will not. Men of goodwill will disagree. Men of Christian faith will err. History is not over, and the maturation of knowledge in the church is not complete. The demand that all Christians adopt the full truth (which, of course, we possess) is not realistic. We must work with people, and try to get them to see the light, but recognize that it takes time. If we get offended, and step out of the conversation, it will take a longer time. We must be able to cancel debts, to put things behind us. The passage of the sabbath periods — days, new moons, and years (in longer-term disputes) — allows this.

How shall we act, then, when wronged? We may decide to overlook the matter, and suffer wrong to keep the peace. We need to make sure, in such cases, that we

genuinely forgive and forget. Or we may call on the person to repent. We try to get third parties, especially elders, to intervene. Frequently they can do nothing but counsel us, because no clear-cut violation of Scripture has occurred, and/or there are not two witnesses. In this life, we are not likely to get things resolved to our satisfaction. When we have tried, and failed, then we let the sabbath principle cancel the debt. God will make it clear in the end.

If it is a matter of personal offense, we can sacrifice ourselves. If it is doctrinal, perhaps future generations will resolve the matter, as Scripture is better understood.

There are those who refuse the kiss, or handshake, of Christian fellowship to those who have wronged them. In our modern church, there is generally no way to appeal to courts for justice, since the courts are generally a farce. The effect of holding out, however, is to make oneself into a church court autonomously. It is an act of autonomous excommunication of another Christian. The power to excommunicate, however, is a joint power, and not bestowed on anyone individually. If no court has excommunicated the offender, I must not refuse to shake his hand, personally offensive though it may be.

Christendom today is littered with men who have cut other Christians off due to some offense, acting autonomously and apart from the decision of any court. Once one has given an offender time to repent, however, it is far better to go ahead and treat him as a brother. We can always say, "I still think you were wrong, but I have placed it in the Lord's hand, and forgiven you your debt. So let's forget the matter, and get on with the business of building the kingdom of God."

The sun is not to go down on our wrath (Eph. 4:26), so that we need to have our minds composed before the face of God before we retire. Conflicts with other Christians, apart from wrath, should not be carried over times of sabbath cancellation. There are, however, several levels of sabbath periods of consider. Minor personal matters should be handled before the Lord's Day. Larger matters may take longer, but process should be instituted before the first Lord's Day comes, so that it no longer is a personal matter. The advice of elders may be sought in deciding how long a sabbath period should be used to prosecute a matter. One might decide to extend the matter until the coming of the first of the month, or of the next festival, or of the turn of the year, or of the coming of the sabbath year, or of the fiftieth year. Some theological matters do take years to resolve. There has to be a cutoff point, however. After that sabbath date, the matter is dropped. If it is personal, it is gone for good until the last day. If it is theological, someone else must raise it in the future.

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