

Daily Devotional, May 17, 2020

'Spiritual Preparation', (Genesis 35:2)

“And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments.’”

(Genesis 35:2, NKJV)

God had commanded Jacob to “go up to Bethel” and do two things: “dwell there” and “make an altar there to God” (Genesis 35:1). The Lord had proven Himself to Jacob to be “a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). Israel (Jacob) testifies that it was “God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone” (Genesis 35:3). Following the obedience of Jacob, God appears to him once again for the purpose of blessing him. The Lord reaffirms his spiritual position in God, which was obtained in Old Testament days by faith in the Messiah Jesus yet to come—just as we obtain favor with God through Christ by faith in His finished Work (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Hebrews 11). God also reaffirms His specific promises to Jacob: namely promised land and promised posterity (Genesis 35:9-11; Matthew 1:2; Luke 3:34). Before meeting the Lord and receiving the blessing, Israel (Jacob) had to prepare his heart and those in his company who would partake of the blessing. Jacob gives three commands to his family and entourage with regard to spiritual preparation, and we would all do well to take heed to them. “Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments.”

“Put away the foreign gods that are among you.” There were many in that company that had been gadding about worshiping dead idols, and not the Living Triune God. If their worship was to be found acceptable to Him, Jacob and his companions would have to consecrate themselves—to choose YHVH and reject impostors.

“Purify yourselves.” In context, this probably refers to ritual purification meant to be an outward sign of an inward reality (e.g. Christian baptism). We will focus on the inward reality. Now it is true that the Christian is said to be purified, or washed, by the Blood of the Lamb (Hebrews 9:22; Revelation 1:5). If purification is God’s Work, why, then, are His people called to purify themselves? Here is the answer: Christians are not to be passive, but active, in their pursuit of godliness and avoidance of those things which inhibit such pursuit. “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8).

“**Change your garments.**” Here again, this is God’s Work at the first (Isaiah 64:6; illustrated in Zechariah 3:1-5). The substitutionary nature of the death of Jesus Christ accomplished this for all men and women of all ages who are saved by placing genuine faith in God’s Gospel (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13). Now here, as in our last point, we also find a command to change our garments. We find the same imperative in the New Testament when we are told to “**put off...the old man**” and “**put on...the new man**” (Ephesians 4:22-24). In other words, we are to put off fleshly things that are sinful and put on spiritual things that are God-glorifying in their place. This is the lifelong process of what the Bible calls sanctification, meaning becoming more Christ-like in the way we conduct ourselves. This brings spiritual freedom from fear and shame. “**Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed**” (John 8:36).

Let us each today heed the godly advice of our text: “**Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments.**”

(This Devotional is a modified version of the sermon delivered 6/10/2012.)