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THE WEDDING GARMENT

DEAR BROTHER RUSSELL: –

I have read with interest and profit THE TOWER of December 1st. I was especially interested in the article on the "Wedding Garment," and would like to ask you a question concerning it: Is it your thought that only those who consecrate are ever really justified – have the robe of Christ's righteousness imputed to them, covering their sins and reckoning them perfect; that other believers have only the blessing of the *knowledge* of provision of justification which will be freely given them only on condition that they sacrifice in the footsteps of our Redeemer?

With much Christian love, I remain yours in the One Hope.

CLARENCE E. FOWLER.

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IN REPLY.

We understand the Scriptures to teach that there is a difference between a *faith*-justification and an *actual*-justification. The world during the Millennial Age under the processes of restitution will have full, grand opportunities for advancing from sin and death conditions to actual justification, righteousness – Covenant relationship with God. In the past the Ancient Worthies, because of faith in God, were esteemed by him and treated as in harmony with him, in Covenant relationship by *faith*, as though they were perfect. But more than that faith-justification they could not attain until after the merit of Christ's sacrifice would be appropriated for them. Christian believers of this Gospel Age are in a still different position. They are justified

by faith in the same manner as were the Ancient Worthies, but additionally, Christ, having now made a special application of the merit of his sacrifice on their behalf under agreement that they will not keep it in a restitutionary sense, but that they will sacrifice it – after the manner shown us in our Lord's example.

So, then, at the beginning of our Christian experience we are granted fellowship with God through a *faith*-justification, which continues available for a reasonable time to permit us to come to a knowledge of the grace of God. It permits our coming to a knowledge of our privileges of sacrificing with our Redeemer; in becoming dead with him to all earthly interests, as well as dead to sin. The taking of this stand of consecration – self-sacrifice – brought to us Divine acceptance, manifested by the begetting of the holy Spirit, and from that position as New Creatures we must progress and make our calling and our election sure. Those who, after coming to a knowledge of the Truth and to an opportunity of consecration to sacrifice unto death, and then fail to respond obediently, lose their justification, in the sense that it fails to become *vital* – divinely approved. Such receive the grace of God in vain – they receive a knowledge of God's mercy and of their own privileges without profiting thereby – without accepting the only "call" of this age. – Eph. 4:4.

Our conclusion or summary, then, is this: There is a justification by faith, which for a time gives a reckoned **[R4548 : page 13]** standing with God in his favor, during this age; but in order for this to become vital justification, it must be followed sooner or later by a full consecration. It is to those who consecrate to sacrifice, "those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" (Psa. 50:5), and who thus by faith become betrothed to Christ as members of his Body through fellowship in his sufferings – it is to these that the wedding garment is given. At a Jewish wedding, we cannot imagine the offering of robes to passers-by, who merely have knowledge that a wedding is in

prospect. The parabolic picture applies to such persons as have heard of the wedding and believed in it and have turned from other works and pleasure with a desire to enter and participate in the matter. Their desires would extend to the taking of the first steps, of entering the door, before they would be handed the wedding garment. So with us. We had a reckoned justification from the time we first believed in Christ, trusted in his merit and heard something of the conditions upon which we could become his joint-heirs. It was not until we had counted the cost and fully decided to enter in, that we were reckoned as members of the Church of the First-born – members of Christ's Betrothed.

It follows, then, that the taking off of the wedding garment would properly enough symbolize either of two acts:

(1) Repudiation of the sacrificial work of Christ; or,

(2) Repudiation of our nuptial contract – to suffer with him; to be dead with him; to drink of his cup; to be baptized into his death; to go to him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

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