

When Your Clothes Don't Fit



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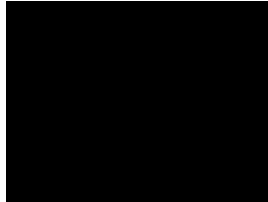
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“When Your Clothes Don't Fit”

When Your Clothes Don't Fit



6

(You need to find a couple of vests ahead of time for the object lesson)

Do you like vests? Are they in fashion right now? I'm not sure whether they're in fashion or out of fashion but I always keep a few on hand because I know that if they are out of fashion now, someday they will be in fashion again. The problem is that I may not always be the same size as I was when the vest was last in fashion. For example, I have trouble buttoning up this vest (struggle with it). And I can't button up this one at all (show how the vest is too small for you).

So what do you do when your clothes don't fit? You have two options: lose some weight or get bigger clothes.



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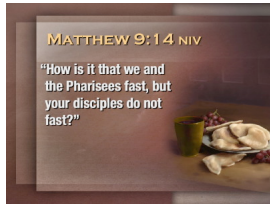
Most of us are very sensitive when it comes to weight. No one likes being told that they are fat.

And what is fat anyway? For most of us the easiest solution is to go out and buy some new clothes.

Now what does building a biblical community have to do with clothes and vests and how they fit? It has to do with change--with looking at things from a different perspective.

The disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus with a question,

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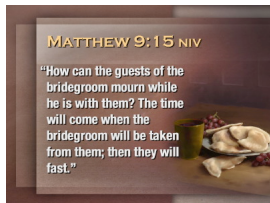


"How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

Matthew 9:14, NIV

8 Fasting was considered a mark of spiritual maturity and growth. It was common for people to fast two days out of every week. John the Baptist being a spiritual leader followed the practices of the religious leaders when it came to fasting.

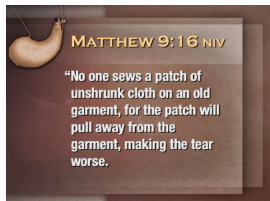
Fasting was practiced in the Old Testament and helps a person to think about spiritual concerns more deeply because your mind and body is not distracted by eating or the preparing of food.



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Jesus answers by drawing an analogy with a wedding party, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."

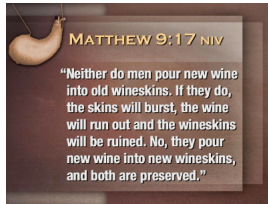
No one fasts at a wedding. In fact the opposite occurs. Jesus says that His coming is like a wedding, a party. He is the Messiah. He has come to liberate people from sin. He has come to vanquish the devil. This is a time for celebration and joy. Then he makes two further comparisons,



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"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse.

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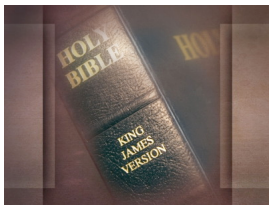
Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

Matthew 9:16-17 NIV



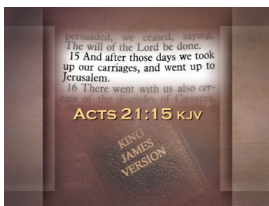
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I want to talk about the analogy of the wineskins. If you have new wine you have to change the containers, the skins in which the wine is held. The wine containers were made out of animal skins that over time would harden. When new wine was poured into the skins they had to be new and supple otherwise the new wine which was still fermenting would destroy old and crusty skins.



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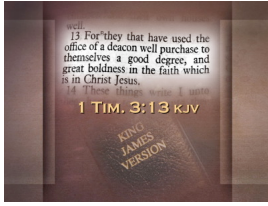
Let's look at an example of why we need to keep changing clothes. Many people were raised on the King James Version of the Bible. I was. All my memorization was from that translation. There are churches today which boast that the only translation of the Bible they use is the King James. But why make reading difficult by using the language of four hundred years ago?



14

For example what does Acts 21:15 mean? "And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem." The word carriage does not mean what we think it might mean, a means of transportation. It meant "We got ready."

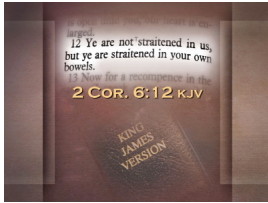
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Here's another one, "For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree."

1 Tim. 3:13 KJV

Is Paul saying that it is OK to go out and buy your academic degree? No. It means that those who have served well gain an excellent standing.



"You are not straitened in us, but you are straitened in your bowels."

2 Cor. 6:12 KJV

Here is the meaning in today's English



"We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us."

2 Cor. 6:12 NIV

Whenever it comes to change people resist. There is something about human nature that prefers the old, maybe because it is what we are used to.



When the umbrella first came to England it was resisted and despised. To Robert Louis Stevenson carrying an umbrella proclaimed a lack of character, as only hypochondriacs, the very frugal, and most respectable worried about getting wet. The status-conscious worried more that an umbrella proclaimed the lack of a carriage.

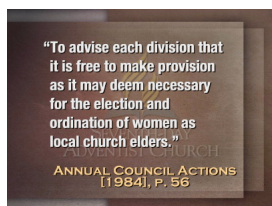
Stories Behind Everyday Things (Pleasantville, NY: The Readers Digest Association, 1980), p. 382

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Now let's bring this down to our time and to our church. For more than a hundred years after our denomination came into being women could not be ordained as local church elders. But as people studied the Bible and the doctrine of spiritual gifts it became more and more difficult to explain why only men could be elders. Finally the new wine of this understanding burst the old wineskins and our theology was changed at the 1984 Annual Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to allow women to be ordained as local elders.



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A definitive position was voted at the 1984 Annual Council: "To advise each division that it is free to make provision as it may deem necessary for the election and ordination of women as local church elders."

(Annual Council Actions [1984] p. 56)

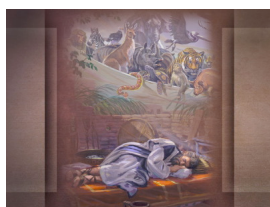
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At one time our church did not believe that Jesus Christ was co-eternal with God. That is, we did not believe that Jesus had always existed, that at some distant time in the past Jesus had been created. This view was spelled out in Uriah Smith's famous commentary on Daniel and Revelation until the mid 1940's when it was finally removed. Jesus is co-eternal with God. George Knight, "Adventists and Change" Ministry, October 1993, p. 11.

But this difficulty with changing theological views is nothing new. The apostle Peter had a big problem and didn't know it. He was staying with Simon the Tanner in his house by the sea in Joppa. One day while waiting for lunch Peter climbed up onto the flat roof to pray.



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As he was praying God gave him a dream. He saw a huge sheet coming down from heaven filled with reptiles, snakes, birds, and all kinds of animals.

A voice from heaven commanded him to eat some of these animals since he was hungry.

Peter instinctively replied, "No Lord, I have never eaten anything that is unclean or impure." Jews were very strict in their diet especially when it came to the unclean foods of Leviticus 11. Again God commands Peter to kill and eat some of these animals. Again Peter says No. A third time the same instructions are given and again Peter shouts No.

The sheet vanishes up into heaven leaving a very puzzled and bewildered Peter.

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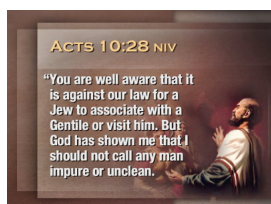


23

The day before in another city a Gentile, a Roman Centurion is praying and asking God for guidance. An angel appears to him and instructs him to send for a man called Peter who is staying with a tanner in Joppa.

Cornelius, who is the centurion, one who loved God, immediately sent three of his servants including a soldier to find Peter. They travel through the night and arrive at Peter's door at lunch time. As they knock on the door Peter is still on the roof puzzling over his dream. As the knock sounds God's spirit speaks to Peter that three men are at the door looking for him and he is not to be afraid but go with them. Jews would have nothing to do with Gentiles considering them to be unclean. This was their theology and it was also Peter's.

Peter makes the journey. He is welcomed warmly by Cornelius and a large group of family and friends who have come to hear Peter. Peter begins his sermon in a very strange way. He begins with a negative, clearly stating his prejudice.

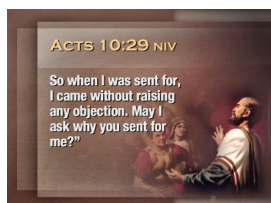


24

ACTS 10:28 NIV

"You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean."

He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean."



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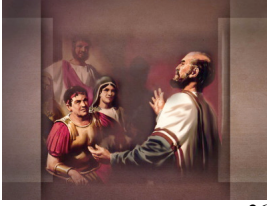
ACTS 10:29 NIV

"So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

Acts 10:28-29 NIV

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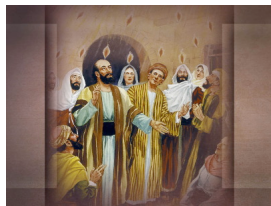
Peter tells them. "I really did not want to come and see you. It is against our theology and against my preferences." What a way to begin a conversation. Then he ends his introduction by saying, "I really have no idea why God told me to come except that He did. So what do you want from me?"

Cornelius replies that he wants to know more about God and while he was praying God told him to send for Peter. "So please tell us everything that God is impressing you to say."

Now there is something quite fascinating about this encounter. God had already spoken to Cornelius. God could have told him everything that Peter was going to say so why send for Peter? God has chosen to use you and me to spread the gospel of His grace. God could speak to everyone directly in the world and He does reach out to everyone. But many people will turn away from those impressions. Many people will only listen when a live human face appears before them.

God wanted Peter to grow. He wanted to remove his prejudices. He wanted him to change his theology. And it is very hard to change our thinking. We have thought it was right for so long it is threatening to think there might be something not quite right. And when the majority of people think the same way as we do we are tempted to turn off our brains and rely on what the majority believes and has voted.

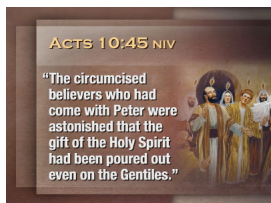
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Peter launches into his favorite subject—Jesus, His death and His resurrection. While he is speaking to these attentive listeners the Holy Spirit falls on them with great power, to the extent that they spontaneously begin to speak in tongues and praise God.

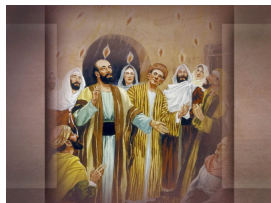
To show how strong Peter's prejudices were even after meeting these earnest people the Bible says,



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"The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles."

Acts 10:45 NIV

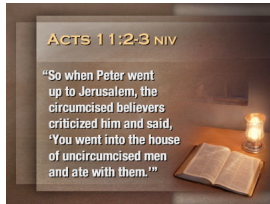


29

Old prejudices die hard. Old ways are hard to unlearn. We hang on to those old wineskins. We hate to throw out those clothes that don't fit. Maybe we will one day be able to get back into them. But we must give Peter credit. When he saw this clear evidence of God's approval he responded in a positive way. He took them all outside and baptized them into the body of Christ. But this was not the end of the matter.

Back at headquarters there were some church leaders who were not happy at this turn of events. How could Peter enter the home of unclean people. Didn't he know that it was against the law and good theology?

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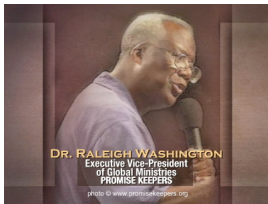


30

We read this description in Acts 11, "So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

Acts 11:2-3 NIV

Horrors, Peter. How could you do such a thing? Peter then explains all that God has done and convinces the skeptics that God is really in this and they reluctantly come round to his point of view.

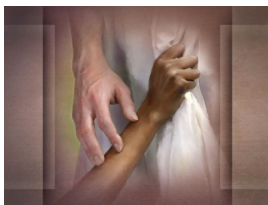


31

Prejudice is still alive and well and such a part of our language we don't even recognize it. This was graphically illustrated at a Promise Keepers Conference in Detroit, African-American minister Raleigh Washington said:

When I was born, I was black. When I grew up, I was still black. When I go out in the cold, I'm still black. When I go out in the sun, I get more black. When I'm sick, I'm black, and when I die, I'm sure I'll still be black.

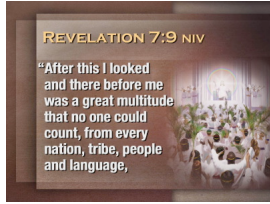
But I found out that when white people are born, you're pink. When you grow up, you become white. When you go out in the cold, you turn blue. And when you stay out in the sun, you turn red. When you're sick, they say, "You look green," and when you die, you turn purple. Now what I want to know is why do they call blacks "colored people"?



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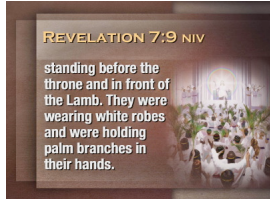
So what clothes don't fit in your theology? What do you need to change? There is one vest, one piece of clothing, that never needs to be changed and that is the robe of Christ's righteousness.

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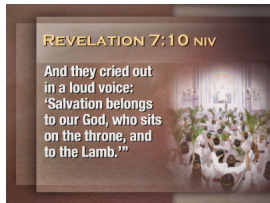
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"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language,



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standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.



35

And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Revelation 7:9-10 NIV

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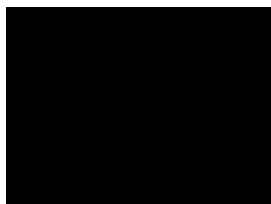
What a picture! Everyone is dressed in the same clothes, white clothes, the perfect righteousness of Jesus. All the clothes fit. None are too small or too large. Notice that this group is ethnically diverse. It comes from every nationality.

We are all saved in the same way, through the blood of Jesus. All of us in this room this morning are guilty of sin and deserve death. But Christ has made a way, not through the Sabbath, or not eating certain foods. Not through how we dress or don't dress. Not through which denomination we belong to. We are all saved in the same way through trusting in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

When we do this we have the assurance of salvation. The moment a person accepts Jesus as Savior and Lord, in that same moment they are ready for heaven and have the assurance of salvation.

How many of you here today have that assurance? Please raise your hand. If you do not have that assurance you may have it right now by saying, "Jesus, please give me your clothes, your suit of righteousness. I place my trust in you even though I don't yet know all that that implies. And if you want to know more please speak to me at the door and I will set up a time when we can talk.

You can wear clothes that fit.



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