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The Seamless Robe

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"They part My garments among them, and upon My vesture do they cast lots." Psalm 22:18 (A.R.V.).

"The soldiers therefore, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also the coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore one to another, "Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be:" that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, 'They parted My garments among them, And upon My vesture did they cast lots.'" John 19:23-24.

Reading: Ezekiel 43:1-12.

The Man Created

As we dwell upon that seamless robe of the Lord Jesus, and see how it was under the very careful, sovereign preservation and protection of God, it is difficult to fail to see that the robe speaks in a typical way of the humanity of the Lord Jesus, of that which the Son of God wore. What did the Son of God wear? He wore the Son of Man! He wore a human life. He wore, as a garment, humanity. He took upon Him the form of a Man. He was found in fashion as a Man. This is signified in the vesture. The vesture, in a word, then, speaks of His humanity. This robe is presented to us as something complete, whole, a perfect unity: of one piece, woven from the top throughout. That is God's conception for man. That is the Man conceived in the mind of God. That humanity is the product of

the counsels of God from eternity; man, in himself personally, individually, and collectively, corporately, a complete whole, a perfect unity; of one piece, woven from the top throughout.

The man created, as produced by the hand of God, as the result of that Divine activity, God's weaving, shall we say, of the humanity of the man, Adam, is a figure of Him that was to come. Before there was any complicity with the adversary, the Devil, before there was any disobedience through unbelief, man was in his own being and nature a unity, a harmony, an accord, a whole. The man created was not a discord, not a tangle, was not a contradiction, was not a divided being, in his own self. He was a figure of Him that was to come; a whole, a unity, of one piece.

The Man Ruined

What is the nature of the ruin? It is as of a one-piece garment rent and torn to shreds.

If you have a one-piece garment torn, you know quite well that you cannot make that good. If you have a two-piece, a three-piece, or a four-piece, you know that in the part where the tear takes place you can remove that and replace it. But when it is a one-piece thing, it is ruined when it is torn. You can patch it, but you have not restored it to its original perfection. You can sew it up, but you have not made it as it was. There have been many efforts to sew up torn humanity, to patch it up, but the patch always reveals the damage, the sewing up always betrays that something has happened, and before long, under given strain the thing breaks again. The Lord Jesus says, "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment"; for the rent is only made worse.

No, this humanity once torn is ruined, and there is no hope but in a new garment, because of its essential oneness before God.

I ask you, is it not true that man is anything but a unity in himself, a oneness, a harmony, a perfect whole? We know ourselves that we are torn and rent, as it were, into many fragments, contradictory elements, in our own make-up. Is not Romans 7 the great unveiling of the dividedness of man? Even when he is brought under Divine law, that dividedness is brought all the more to light. "For that which I do I know not; for not what I would, that do I practice; but what I hate, that I do." Here I am, straining in one direction and going in the opposite. I am a division. I am a contradiction. I am not one piece. I desire right, but against my desire I do wrong, and in spite of all my purposing I do it. I am not one. A river always flows in one direction, in one way, but not so human nature. It is sadly otherwise with our nature now. We are not flowing all one way. Even when perhaps the greater part seems to be working harmoniously to one end, there is always a reactionary "something" in us, a kick back. It needs no stressing that we are anything but a unity. No, the garment has been rent. Even our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Man's humanity now is in rags at its best. Man is ruined, torn, disrupted.

The New Man Pre-figured

We shall not stay longer than to point out that in the Old Testament there is a pre-figuring of the new man. In those men who came into a living relationship with God in the Old Testament, you find the spiritual and moral threads of the new man pre-figured, the threads being woven typically into the form of the new man. It may be the faith of an Abraham, the meekness of a Moses, the worship of a David, the truth of an Elijah, the life of an Elisha, and so on. These are all threads in typical men, being woven into the One Perfect Man, the garment of a renewed humanity. All of them are to be

found in the new Man when He comes. He takes up all those moral elements, all those spiritual features; they are woven from the top throughout in His humanity. See the wonder of His faith, the beauty of His humility, His meekness: See the devoutness of His worship, His honouring of God, His Father: See the zeal for truth which burns with a blazing heat more than that of Elijah: See Him as the life, the power of life triumphant over death, as in an Elisha, and so on. These are all the threads of His humanity, and all this is pre-figured in the Old Testament.

The New Man Provided

No longer is it now the figure, but the Man Himself. His humanity is not the humanity of Adam, but a transcendent humanity. There is all the difference between God creating Adam and God providing Jesus Christ. But we will not stay with the comparison or contrast between Adam and Christ for the moment. We point out that the new Man is provided, and in this new Man you cannot detect any join; you cannot trace any place where two things have been sewn together. He is not in parts, He is whole. Oh, the wonderful completeness, perfection, balance, wholeness, harmony of His humanity. He can be angry, with a burning anger, without ever losing His balance and allowing fleshly heat to come in; but, being angry, He can at the same time be full of love. He can turn from one thing to another, and on the surface these things may seem to be altogether at variance, and yet in Him they are so perfectly poised that you are no longer sensible of any contradiction in His Presence. We could stay a long time with the perfect balance of His humanity, the oneness of His humanity. Oh, He is not a patchwork: He is not so many parts joined together: He is a perfect whole. He is of one piece, woven from the top throughout.

The New Man Tested

The new Man provided! Ah, yes, but tested. This humanity, like the garment, is subjected to the test. All the strain is loosed upon it. Its power for taking moral strain is tested. Every one of those threads in the garment is put to the test. Meekness? Cast Thyself down from the pinnacle of the Temple! What would such an act have been? A proud boast! And men would have said, You are a wonderful Man; we will follow You! No, to have yielded would have been to have forsaken meekness. "Behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt" (John 12:15). But that meekness was oft-times put to the test. On another occasion the multitude would take Him by force and make Him King, and He escaped through the midst of them. There it is given us to see His devotion to His Father, that devotion which is the essence of worship, the fear of the Lord, that utter abandonment to God. That was the great characteristic of David's life. Whatever were the faults of David, you cannot get away from the true worshipfulness of his being toward God. The sublime touches in the darkest hours of David's life are those. Even when he has sinned in numbering Israel, and God visits his sin with terrible judgment, he goes down before God and says, "Lo, I have sinned, and I have done perversely: but these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house" (2 Sam. 24:17). What fear of the Lord! What reverence for God! What a falling down before God in utterness of surrender and yieldedness! That was the spirit of David's life. And the perfection of that spirit, that devotion to His Father in the life of the Lord Jesus was put to severe tests. "If thou be the Son!" Right at the end, when men come and take Him with swords and staves, Son of God as He was, He tells them that if He should ask His Father He would send twelve legions of angels: but that devotion to His Father must mean that the angels must stay where they were. He was put to the test.

We might dwell upon all the moral features of Christ, and see how they were tested, tried under strain. This fabric underwent a very severe test in every thread.

The New Man Proved

Tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin! Not only without sinning in the act, but without sin is this Man. Sin is a deeper thing than sinning.

The New Man Perfected

How? Through suffering. This is the word of the Lord. I said that in a Conference some years ago, and afterwards I was taken to task very severely: How dare you speak about Jesus Christ being perfected! He always was perfect! He was never anything but perfect! But I quote Scripture: "Made perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10). That is said of Him. We need not stop to argue the doctrine. To quote the Scripture is enough. He was sinless: He was perfect; and yet He was perfected. If you cannot understand the seeming contradiction look again, and ask the Lord to enlighten you. It is only another way of saying that He was perfected through the strain placed upon the fabric.

A sapling may have no vices in it. It may be a perfect tree as a sapling. But show me that sapling grown to the full tree in a few years' time, and I will say, It is perfected through sufferings: not that those sufferings bore witness to any vice, but its perfections were being brought out to perfection through the storm, the stress, the strain. It is a matter of the measure of perfection, not so much of kind.

The Man Installed

"I see the heavens opened, and the *Son of man* standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). "Inasmuch as he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained" (Acts 17:31). The Man is eventually coming again to be the instrument of the judgment of this world in righteousness. God shall judge the thoughts of men by Jesus Christ: "He gave him authority to execute judgment, *because he is the Son of Man*" (John 5:27). It is into the hands of the Son of Man that God has given all authority in heaven and in earth. Thank God that there is a Man in the glory. Thank God for all that means for you and for me in our need of a perfected humanity. He is installed there as God's standard, and the earnest of our full conformity to the image of God's Son is that He has given us His Spirit. We have the earnest of that. "When he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). What is the earnest, the guarantee, the title deed? The Spirit of Christ now dwelling within.

The New Man Related, and Corporately Expressed

"And gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephes. 1:22-23). What is the expression of that? Or, shall we put it in another way: What is the significance and implication of Christ related as in the simile of a seamless robe? As Head of the Church which is His Body, He is a oneness of nature, a oneness of life, a oneness of everything. His Headship represents the oneness that is in Christ Jesus.

We can hardly divide these two last features. They are really the two sides of one whole; related, and corporately expressed. They are represented by two letters, the letter to the Colossians, and the

letter to the Ephesians. One sets forth the absolute sovereign Headship of Christ, the other the unity of the Church which is His Body. They have their own emphasis and meaning and value. The Colossian letter sees all things gathered up into Christ, summed up in Him, and all things holding together in Him; and then the statement is made that He is the Head of the Church, His Body. As Head, in that perfected, glorified humanity, there is secured and established a oneness which is indestructible.

Look back for a moment upon that seamless robe. The Psalmist has prophesied. Hundreds of years afterwards the scenes of the Cross are transpiring. The scenes pass rapidly, with their many details and incidents, and in the course of the whole these men, the roughest, most brutal, insensible, cruel, thoughtless, caring really nothing about fine things, having crucified Jesus, sat down to watch Him, so we are told by Matthew. They had stripped Him of His garments, and their eyes fell upon them, and they saw the possibility of some capital in those garments. They were avaricious men, whose whole thought was any kind of acquisition, gain, profit; yes, profit out of a thing like this. Did ever man sink so low? To crucify a Man, and then in the presence of that dying One to think only of what they could get out of His garments for themselves? So they, being four, find four pieces, and take one each. Then coming to a fifth and recognizing that this is a garment which is of one piece and that there is not much to be gained by dividing it into four, they toss for it. That is what it amounts to. The dice is brought out and cast, and one man is lucky and gets the seamless robe in addition to the other. It all looks like a horrible bit of the whole evil programme. And yet, standing back in the shadows, is God Almighty, exercising His sovereign power, bridging the gap of hundreds of years. A Psalmist had prophesied under the inspiration of the Eternal Spirit, and God is watching that word to perform it, and the most brutal, cruel, insensible men come under that sovereignty unconsciously, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. Even the worst of men are compelled to fulfill the counsels of God, and that oft-times unconsciously. Anything that belongs to Christ is watched over by God. It is because of the principle lying behind it, the spiritual meaning in the thought of God.

What does that seamless robe mean? God is careful of His types, of His prophecies, even of His foreshadowings, until He brings them to fulfilment. Not one bit of the type has failed of fulfilment, and this shall not, and God brings it through in His sovereign over-ruling. Of what does it speak? It speaks of a unity which Christ represents which is indestructible, a oneness in Him which cannot be divided. It means, in one broad, glorious word of affirmation, that in Christ victorious all the damage by the fall has been put away, and God has secured His thought. There is no rent here. That has all been removed. The old garment of Adam has been destroyed, and God has brought in His new seamless garment, and established it in the place where it can never again be rent. Satan cannot get at Him. Sin cannot get at Him. All these have tried themselves out to the limit upon that garment, and by sovereign power He has triumphed. By the glory of the Eternal Spirit in Him He has overcome. The oneness of Christ by the Eternal Spirit has been preserved, and it is there in a related position, related to you and to me. Turning it round the other way, through faith in Christ and by receiving the Holy Spirit, we are related to Him and all His perfect humanity.

What is the corporate expression? "Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephes. 4:13). "Joined to the Lord one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). What is the Church? What is the Body of Christ? It is that which by the Eternal Spirit is linked with the exalted and perfected Lord *in one life and in one substance*. We are partakers. When we take the loaf and the cup we are testifying to the fact that we are partaking by faith in the spirit of that perfect humanity. We look, in other words, into the face of Jesus Christ, and, as we look, we are changed into

the same image. Oh, that we might see, on the one hand, what Christ installed and related means, and then what the Church is as the expression of the unity of Christ, the oneness of Christ, through partaking of Him. To use the word in the Colossians, "Holding fast the head." It is not too late even now for the Lord to have a company on this earth who will hold fast the Head. What does it mean to hold fast the Head? In a word, it means to allow the Lord Jesus to express Himself in us in absolute sovereignty, to bring us into the unity of the Spirit, the unity of the faith, the unity of direct government from heaven. That is the only way to unity. Now some of the things we are up against are just in that realm. The question arises, is it to be ecclesiastical government or government by the Holy Ghost? That is one of the great issues - the government of a man-established system, or government by the Holy Ghost? Is it to be an order imposed from the outside, or is it to be the form expressed from the inside? In a word, is it to be ecclesiastical, or is it to be organic?

These are tremendous issues. The answering of those things all bears upon this great question of holding fast the Head. Is it to be the Holy Ghost, or is it to be the committee? I have never known members of my body to get into committee, to tell the head what it ought to do. I have never known my arm and my hand, and perhaps some other members, saying, Now look here, we will form a board, and get up our programme, and tell the head what we want done or what we intend to do, and how we intend to do it! It does not work that way. The head governs the members. Which kind of order will obtain depends on how far the truth of holding fast the Head is being expressed. The oneness of Christ in His thought, His purpose, His way, His means, His time, His everything, expressed in the saints, is what is in view. It is not too late to have that in a company.

Now what is the occasion of all that we have said? Well, when we have said everything, we have to come back to this, that after all, old Adam is not a unity like that, and that is why you get such a contrary expression in what is called the Church. Discords, divisions, contradictions, contrasts, schisms, stress! Oh, the history of the Church as an earthly thing is just such a history as that. That is its history because it is an earthly thing. But Christ is one. And I do not believe that you will get three or four different interpretations of the same Scripture, if you are under the government of the Holy Ghost. I do not believe that you will get three or four different orders of Church arrangement, if you are under the government of the Holy Spirit. He is one. Christ is one. It is not for us, mark you, to say, Well, we are right and everybody else is wrong! Beware of any spirit like that! But I do say this: Be quite sure that the ground upon which you stand is not the ground of your study, your reason, your comparing of one thing with another, but upon the ground of the absolute sovereignty and the Headship of Jesus Christ by the Holy Ghost. If you do not stand on that ground, you have no right whatever to claim to be superior to others.

However, we come to this position at last. The Cross surely does come in and cleave between Adam in all his dividedness, his discord, his torn and rent state. Individually and collectively the Cross cuts that whole thing off: in its tatters, in its rags, in its divided threads, in its ruined fabric, and puts it away. It is rolled up like a garment and buried for ever, and in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus the new man comes in, a unity, a whole.

We can test our relationship to the Lord Jesus on two points. Firstly, that we find there is a progressive triumph in our own being of that which is ruling out the contradiction, a progressive victory taking place over the schism in our own being; that Christ is getting the upper hand more and more, and bringing us to that glorious peace which is the peace of harmony. That, of course, wants a lot of explaining and breaking up, but let us touch it at one small point and you will see what we mean, and it will open a great field. As we go on with the Lord, walking in the Spirit, or in other

words, as Christ is becoming more and more Master in us, so there is a lessening and a decreasing of those awful conflicts, and of that awful unrest and lack of peace, that spring from our trying to explain the ways of the Lord. Faith has ruled out our reasonings, and we are learning to trust the Lord, and peace comes in. We are in the ascendant, and the dividedness, the stormy conflict of our own souls, is silenced, is hushed; He is bringing about a harmony. I believe as we become more and more spiritually mature we shall have fewer storms between ourselves and the Lord, and more peace; not because things will become easier; not because problems will cease to exist; not because mysteries will disappear, but because faith is trusting the Lord, and all this schism in our being is being subdued; and we are coming to a poise, a balance, a rest, a settledness. It is the oneness in us of Christ.

What is true in the individual becomes true amongst the saints, and we can again test our relationship to the Lord, our progress, by the transcendence through His love of those human elements, those natural things, which come between us, so that while the natural things are still there, and people are still themselves, and the old Adam is not ruled out in other people, nevertheless there is a growing ascendancy over that in others, a forbearance, an understanding, a love, and the seamless robe is being woven; for the beauty, so to speak, is being expressed in the Body.

Woven from the top! Where is that? Where the Head is. Woven from the top throughout! The Lord give us to wear inwardly and outwardly the seamless robe.