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NAKEDNESS & COVERINGS IN GENESIS 3: WHAT THEY ARE AND WHY IT MATTERS

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Nakedness plays an important rhetorical role in the Fall/Curse narrative of Genesis 3. It is also an idea that, perhaps on account of the awkwardness it evokes, has been less than thoroughly explored. The term *naked* appears four times in the pericope (2:25; 3:7, 10, 11) and the fact and remedy for nakedness supply bookends for the story (2:25; 3:21), further underscoring its significance for interpretation. Why God employed such an uncomfortable theme in the chapter is, as we shall discover, a matter of some debate, but most would agree that God's intent is to lay stress on some feature of Adam and Eve's sin and/or its remedy, the greater focus of the chapter. A very popular interpretive suggestion in Reformed and evangelical biblical theology has been that the nakedness motif points to Adam and Eve's *guilt* and that the coverings motif is typological of *sacrificial atonement*. More recently, several biblical theologians have adopted Paul's *clothing/baptism* motif as a more promising point of typological emphasis. Several factors, however, stand against these understandings. It is the purpose of this article to demonstrate firstly that the text itself points explicitly to the systematic theological ideas of *shame* and *mortification*, and secondly that the common errors of identification are symptomatic of the excessively typological and Christocentric hermeneutics that dominate current expressions of evangelical biblical theology.

THE FACT OF NAKEDNESS IN GENESIS 3

Our study begins with the last verse of Genesis 2, which serves as a transition between the blissful state of chapter 2 and the disaster in chapter 3. Adam and Eve begin their primitive existence both naked (רוֹמִּם) and without shame (לֹא יִתְבֹּשָׁשׁוּ).[2] The idea of nakedness without

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[2]An ancient understanding, that Adam and Eve were clothed in "light" or "glory" before the Fall and thus were not technically naked (so *The Life of Adam and Eve* 20.1–2; *Apocalypse of Adam*, 1.2–5), derives apparently from the observation that every other instance of nakedness in the Hebrew Scriptures has negative implications (see commentary by Ephrem the Syrian and Chrysostom in *Genesis 1–11*, ed. Andrew Louth, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 72). The theory, however, has no exegetical merit: our text states unequivocally that Adam and Eve were naked prior to the Fall.

shame is a rare one in the OT, as nakedness after this initial mention is uniformly associated with negative ideas such as poverty (Job 24:7, 10), vulnerability (Job 1:21; Eccl 5:15), and violent exposure/humiliation (1 Sam 19:24?; Job 22:6; 26:6; Isa 20:2–4; 58:7; Hos 2:5; Amos 2:16; and Micah 1:8). Moses switches to a variant of this root (עֵירֹם) for the balance of our pericope (3:7, 10, 11), but the latter term is synonymous with the former, and is paired with similar themes: poverty (Deut 28:48; Ezek 18:7, 16), vulnerability (Ezek 16:7, 22), and violent exposure/humiliation (Deut 28:48; Ezek 16:39; 23:29). John Sailhamer suggests that Moses's intent in employing two distinct terms is significant, with עָרוֹם communicating an "innocent" nakedness and עֵירֹם a nakedness of divine judgment.[3] A survey of usage, however, reveals no appreciable difference of meaning between עָרוֹם and עֵירֹם, and no intrinsic implication of divine judgment attached uniquely to the latter term. Niehr summarizes, "It is striking that—except in Genesis 2:25—*all* occurrences of [both] *ʿārôm/ʿêrôm* are in negative contexts, in which the nakedness denoted by *ʿārôm/ʿêrôm* is a sign of poverty, need, vulnerability, grief, captivity, self-serving or adultery."[4]

The innocence of public nudity ends abruptly in Genesis 3:7 when Adam and Eve's eyes are opened by their experience of evil as they ate the forbidden fruit. Indeed, realization of their nakedness is the very first recorded observation that they make in their depraved state. Prior to this time, the idea of nakedness had been the presumptive state of all animal life (and continues to be the normal state of all but humans): the idea of clothing was an alien one. This reflects in God's question in 3:11, "Who told you that you were naked?" Apart from sin, it would seem, the idea of clothing would never have materialized (except, perhaps, for incidental functions like decoration or protection from ordinary hazards). But now having experienced sin, Adam and Eve were suddenly and acutely aware of the full range of evil that might be perpetrated by and upon naked persons, and they were no longer comfortable with the idea—even, apparently, in each other's company.[5] They

[3]"Genesis," in vol. 1 of the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman, III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 84. Victor Hamilton draws attention to the spelling change as though it were important, but admits in a footnoted reference to a leading lexicon that "there is no observable difference in meaning between the adjectives *ʿērōm* (3:7) and *ʿārōm* (2:25) (*The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 191, n. 15).

[4]*TDOT*, s.v. "עָרוֹם *ʿārôm*; עֵרוֹם *ʿêrôm*," by H. Niehr, 11:348, emphasis added; see also BDB, 735–36. Note that I am not suggesting here that nakedness is uniformly evil, but rather that depravity so colors the concept that all appropriate instances of nudity are now private rather than public in nature. Clearly all *public* nudity in the wake of the Fall has become shameful.

[5]Note that their discomfort was not immediately in view of the impending arrival of God in "the cool of the day" (though this event causes them shame too), but in view of *each other* (see esp. the implications of the hithpolel of Gen 2:25 on Adam and Eve's discovery of nakedness and their response to it in Jack M. Sasson, "Wᵉlō' yitbōšāšû

required an alternative to nudity and set about inventing one.

The passage closes with a final, oblique reference to nakedness in v. 21, where God uses animal skins to more properly clothe the man and the woman. As we shall see below, the clothing that God makes improves on Adam and Eve's primitive attempt on multiple levels, supplying a more complete and satisfying solution to their plight.

THE THEOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF NAKEDNESS IN GENESIS 3

John Sailhamer's observation, above, that the particular term for nakedness used in Genesis 3:7, 10, 11 (עֵירֹם) symbolically reflects "being under God's judgment"[6] anticipates his view that the theological idea communicated by nakedness in Genesis 3 is one of *guilt.*[7] This in turn colors his understanding (or perhaps is colored *by* his understanding?) that the coverings of verse 21 typify *atonement for guilt*, a popular view to be discussed below.[8] As we shall see, however, exegesis does not bear out this understanding. Instead, the only theological idea explicitly associated in our passage with Adam and Eve's nakedness is that of *shame*,[9] an idea sometimes paired with guilt in the Scriptures, but certainly not synonymous with it. Most suggest, too, that the idea of the shame of nakedness (here and elsewhere) also carries with it an implicit *vulnerability* to physical and sexual harm.[10]

[Gen 2,25] and Its Implications," *Biblica* 66 [1985]: 418–21). Again, this is not a suggestion that nudity and sexual activity are to be considered uniformly evil in the aftermath of the Fall; still, every married couple today, even the happiest, knows occasional misgivings about each other's hidden thoughts and motives in the midst of their nuptial pleasures. And this is because all persons today know sin by experience, each individual knowing the foul wanderings of his/her own mind and occasionally suspecting the same in his/her spouse.

[6]"Genesis," 84.

[7]So Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 224–25; Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 144. Victor Hamilton makes a similar assessment, arguing that the "most frequent" idea communicated by nakedness is *guilt*. He offers as evidence, however, only that nakedness attends slavery and military defeat—themes that have no necessary guilt attached to them (*Genesis 1–17*, 181).

[8]Sailhamer, "Genesis," 94; and among other modern commentators, esp. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 224–25, 254–55. This tradition reflects an understanding popular during the first wave of conservative biblical theology around the turn of the twentieth century (so, e.g., Marcus Dods, *The Book of Genesis*, The Expositor's Bible [New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1902], 24–27; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The First Book of Moses [Genesis]*, trans. James Martin, Commentary on the Old Testament, 10 vols. [repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996], 1:60–61, 66–67).

[9]Among others, see esp. John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 206, 230.

[10]Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 127; Bruce Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 90; etc.

Guilt as a Theological Concept

The idea of *guilt* in Scripture and theology is coldly objective and legal in nature and may be defined quite simply as liability to punishment. Glosses that attend the standard Hebrew root for guilt (אשׁם) in one major lexicon include "indebtedness" and "making someone pay," whether by "suffering," "restitution," or "compensation."[11] To be *guilty* is to be obliged to pay a penalty for some crime. Now it is surely true that a person's discovery of liability to legal penalties may evoke a great number of emotions (anger, frustration, shame, etc.), but it may evoke no emotions at all. In truth, one cannot technically "feel guilty," even though the phrase is a common one. One either is objectively guilty or objectively not guilty. Feelings are irrelevant.

The remedy for guilt, theologically speaking, is *propitiation* (the satisfaction of some legal standard by means of acceptable payment) and/or *expiation* (the formal removal of liability to punishment).[12] Nothing else will do. That "covering" can function as a positive biblical response to sin is conceded (so Job 14:17; Neh 4:5; Ps 85:2; and esp. Ps 32:1 [with Rom 4:7]). However, as we shall see, not all instances of "covering sin" are positive; indeed, the act of covering sin apart from expiation/propitiation is uniformly regarded in Scripture as an inappropriate response to sin (so, e.g., Ps 32:5).

Shame as a Theological Concept

Unlike *guilt*, the state of *shame* is subjective and acutely felt. Shame involves a sense of embarrassment, humiliation, insecurity, or vulnerability, usually in view of the public disclosure of some ethical breach or indecency. Both the Akkadian root for shame and the Hebrew one—בוֹשׁ (Gen 2:25)—carry the sense of *exposure*, precipitating the idea that some impropriety or shortcoming (real or perceived) has occurred: an individual is "put to shame" by the fact that others have been made aware of some deficiency (so esp. Isa 47:3; Jer 13:26).[13] The exposure of one's guilt is a common reason for shame, but is by no means the only reason for shame.[14] A person may also be ashamed for innocuous reasons like poverty, ignorance, or skill deficiencies (Jer 14:4; Joel 1:11). A

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[11] *HALOT*, s.v. "אשׁם, אָשָׁם, אָשֵׁם," 1:95–96.

[12] Among other discussions, see esp. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 24–33.

[13] *TDOT*, s.v. "בוֹשׁ *bôsh*; בּוּשָׁה *bûshāh*; בֹּשֶׁת *bōsheth*; מְבוּשִׁים *mᵉbhûshîm*," by Horst Seebass, 2:51. In Claus Westermann's words, shame is a "reaction to being discovered unmasked" (*Genesis 1–11*, trans. John J. Scullion [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], 236).

[14] Westermann ridicules Keil and Delitzsch for narrowly defining shame as "the correlative of sin and guilt," calling their assessment "disastrous" (*Genesis 1–11*, 236). He is correct. Wenham argues more gently, "The Hebrew root בוֹשׁ 'to be ashamed' does not carry the overtones of personal guilt that English 'shame' includes" (*Genesis*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word, 1987], 71).

person may be ashamed of something that should not cause shame (in principle, Heb 12:2); conversely, he may be shameless when he ought to be ashamed (Jer 3:3; 6:15; 8:12). Feelings of shame may be commendable "preconditions for repentance" (Ps 69:7–8; Zeph 3:5),[15] but may oppositely reflect untoward pride (Phil 3:19).

Just as the circumstances of shame are not monolithic, so also the remedy for shame is not monolithic. A person may mitigate (or, alternately, cultivate) his shame by *training* his own conscience and psyche to respond properly to the shame-producing factor. A person may also alleviate shame by *concealing* the embarrassing factor (in principle, Mic 7:10; Nah 3:5). In other cases, there is no way to alleviate shame other than to *bear* it humbly. Unlike guilt, shame has no uniform solution.

An Evaluation of Adam and Eve's Shame as a Response to Nakedness

That Adam and Eve are ashamed in their nakedness after the Fall is not explicitly stated, but is accepted by all on account of the implied contrast to their earlier, shameless state (Gen 2:25) and the attempt to make clothing out of fig leaves. What is not accepted by all is the reason for their shame. As we have seen, many assume that the reason for Adam and Eve's shame is their guilt, leading some to approve of their actions in 3:7 as the first step toward remediation.[16] Four factors stand against this conclusion. First, as we noted above, Adam and Eve's attempt to make clothing was not firstly *coram deo* (i.e., facing the divine punishment incurred by guilt), but an alleviation of reciprocal shame felt in each other's company.[17] Second, it is evident that Adam and Eve's initial response of shame (v. 7) occurs well in advance of any attempt to remedy their guilt, which does not occur until they have first exhausted a plethora of strategies to escape culpability (vv. 8–13): avoidance, diversion, blame-shifting, excuse-making, etc.[18] Third, it is unclear how making clothing out of leaves (or out of anything, for that matter) could possibly have absolved them of guilt: their actions are all wrong if liability to punishment is their concern.[19] Fourth, we have abundant biblical testimony that shame regularly occurs without any reference to repentance. Indeed, the great majority of instances in which

[15]*NIDOTTE*, s.v. "בוֹשׁ," by Philip J. Nel, 1:622.

[16]Derek Kidner, for instance, opines that "the [shame] instinct was sound and God confirmed it (21), for sin's proper fruit is shame" (*Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967], 69). Irenaeus was similarly inclined (Louth, ed., *Genesis 1–11*, 79).

[17]So again Sasson, "W^{e}lō' yitbōšāšû and Its Implications," 418–21.

[18]So Augustine, who sees their fig garments as an attempt to deceive (Louth, ed., *Genesis 1–11*, 81).

[19]Admittedly, guilty people do all sorts of inventive things to escape punishment—they run, hide, lie, make excuses, and even punish themselves. But fabricating fig-leaf clothing makes no sense at all if they are trying to address a guilt problem.

persons and nations are "put to shame" reflect contexts of punitive disgrace, not remediating grace.

As such, Adam and Eve's shame seems almost certainly to be a case of *embarrassment at having been exposed*, both in their persons and in their actions. As such, their response of making clothing springs from a sense of self-consciousness, vulnerability, and insecurity. Such embarrassment is not necessarily commendable.

THE FACT OF "COVERINGS" IN GENESIS 3

There are two coverings mentioned in the third chapter of Genesis: a failed attempt at coverings made from fig leaves and a superior covering of skins. The first covering, made by Adam and Eve from fig leaves and reflected in verse 7 in the term חֲגֹרֹת, is a meager garment that covered little more than the genitalia. Emphasis here is on the "skimpiness" of the garment.[20] Common English translations of the term in the five other instances of the term include *girdle*, *loincloth*, or simply *belt* (Gen 3:7; 2 Sam 18:11; 1 Kgs 2:5; 2 Kgs 3:21; and Isa 3:24).

The second covering, represented in verse 21 by the term כָּתְנֹת, is a more comprehensive garment made of skins.[21] Common English translations of the term include that attempt to interpret the term beyond the generic *garment* or *clothing* prefer terms such as *shirt*, *robe*, or *tunic*. Wenham suggests that the garment would have reached all the way to the ankles.[22] The reason for the more comprehensive clothing is not stated. Some have seen a connection with God's requirement that priests wear linen underwear (מִכְנָסַיִם) that covers their hips and thighs to avoid guilt and subsequent death (Exod 28:42–43),[23] but the discontinuities between these two situations are too great to make such a link.[24] Most probably we should view a כָּתְנֹת as more effective than a חֲגֹרֹת for the purpose of covering Adam and Eve physically.

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[20]Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 76.

[21]It is possible that the Hebrew could read garments *for* the skin, leaving the material unspecified, but this understanding is improbable (Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 29).

[22]Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 84; also Sarna, *Genesis*, 21; Waltke, *Genesis*, 95; John D. Currid, *Genesis*, 2 vols., EP Study Commentary (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2003), 1:139.

[23]Sailhamer, "Genesis," 94; also Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 254–55); Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 84–85; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 230.

[24]Though a matter of some debate, Adam is never called a priest (much less his wife, who also receives a garment); the garments in view are quite distinct (the priest wears underwear with minimal coverage similar to that of Adam and Eve's original garments, while Adam and Eve's new garments offer substantial coverage); the material is different (linen vis-à-vis skins); Adam and Eve's garments are worn with a view to each other while the priestly garments are worn only in view of God; etc.

The Theological Function of "Coverings" in Genesis 3

We now arrive to what is probably the most disputed and significant question of this essay, viz., the reason for the clothing that Adam and Eve first contrived and that God later perfected. Several clues emerge.

The Two Coverings Contrasted

Our first cluster of observations stem from the observation that the initial covering Adam and Eve made was inadequate for its purpose, whereas God's covering did all that it was intended to do. We have already seen one of these differences in the (1) disparate words used of the two attempts at making clothing, *loincloth* (חֲגֹרָה) vis-à-vis *tunic* (כֻּתֹּנֶת), the most obvious difference between which is one of actual physical coverage. Besides this difference we find (2) the fact that leaves are inferior to skins as a choice of material for clothing and (3) the addition of a real remedy for sin that is present the second covering, but absent in the first.

A Difference of Coverage

The difference of coverage between a loincloth and a tunic could no doubt be exploited in the wrong hands to add specificity to God's expectation of modesty in, say, beachwear. That is not the point that is directly at issue here, if at all. It is worth noting, however, that if the function of the clothing is strictly symbolic of God's remedy for guilt, then any garment (a loincloth or a tunic) would have worked. If, however, the goal is the mitigation of shame and the protection of the wearers from sinful aggression, then a tunic is superior to a loincloth.

A Difference of Material

Of greater significance, for some, is a difference of material from which the two garments were made. But what *is* the significance? It goes without saying, of course, that skins are a far better material than fig leaves for durable and substantial clothing. Many, however, point also to the fact that God's use of skins introduces the world, likely for the very first time, to the fact of animal death.[25] This observation of death in the wake of sin leads further, for some of these, to the supposition that the death of these animals is the initial prototype for bloody sacrifice that expands in the levitical system and finds its ultimate antitype in the substitutionary atonement wrought by our Lord Christ at the

[25]While some argue that Adam's world, being already very old, had known death for a long time, Paul makes clear that not only was human death a result of the Fall (Rom 5:12–19), but also creaturely death in general (Rom 8:19–23): the *terminus a quo* of all death is Adam's sin, and its *terminus ad quem* is the eschatological "revelation of the sons of God."

Crucifixion.[26] In the face of this suggestion, however, we find little to suggest that death and especially sacrifice are key points of emphasis. The fact of violent death is not mentioned; at best it is implied and that without fanfare. We furthermore find no language of substitution, expiation, or propitiation; no manipulation or even mention of blood; no mention of fire; and no cultic language—only a passing reference to skins, a part of the animal that features only minimally in cultic contexts. To argue from silence all of these implications is the essence of speculation and interpretive invention. To cite Walton,

> It is a serious error to read sacrifice between the lines of verse 21. The institution of sacrifice is far too significant an occurrence to leave it entirely to inference. Again we stress that it is our objective as interpreters to understand what the author wished to communicate, not to piece together answers we would like to know from reading between the lines. The author is clearly not communicating anything about sacrifice here, for he does not address that issue.[27]

A Difference of Manufacturer

That Adam made his own loincloth (חֲגֹרָה) but God his tunic (כְּתֹנֶת) is sometimes cited as a critical difference in this narrative as well. Adam's attempt, for interpreters in this tradition, is symbolic of his futile attempt to accomplish by his own works what God alone could accomplish for him. Many who argue thusly will identify Adam's two outfits as prototypical not of sacrifice (discussed immediately above), but of another biblical thread, viz., Paul's *clothing* motif.[28] God removes the old garment that was ours in Adam and replaces it with a regenerate new self (so Eph 4:22–24; Col 3:9–10), illustrates the same in Christian baptism, and completes the type in resurrection (1 Cor 15:51–54). Some will add to this typological imagery of yet another motif-type, namely the priesthood/sanctuary theme of Scripture: just as we see a body/clothing motif progressing through the biblical material, so also the idea of man's rightful approach to God via a series of coverings

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[26]Sailhamer, "Genesis," 94; so also Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 254–55; Waltke, *Genesis*, 95; Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 149; Jonathan D. Sarfati, *The Genesis Account* (Powder Springs, GA: Creation Book Publishers, 2015), 387; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 10, 53; Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 150, 218, 228.

[27]Walton, *Genesis*, 229. Westermann concurs, opining, "The connection of clothing made out of skins with the killing of animals and so with sacrifice…plays no role in the present context" (*Genesis 1–11*, 270). See also Currid, *Genesis*, 1:139; Joel D. Heck, "Was Cain's Offering Rejected by God Because It Was Not a Blood Sacrifice? NO," in *The Genesis Debate*, ed. Ronald F. Youngblood (Nashville: Nelson, 1986), 138.

[28]G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 866–68; G. K. Beale and Benjamin Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014), 133–34, 144–46, 300–302.

(whether the linen underwear discussed above, priestly garments generally, or exclusive tents and shielding curtains) progresses to a similarly eschatological climax in the resurrection (so Lev 16:23–24).[29]

This understanding is an ancient one with roots in early Jewish tradition, and relieves to a degree the tensions raised by the sacrifice idea. Still, one wonders, as Walton did above in our discussion of the sacrifice motif, why God would employ such abstract symbolism to introduce so critical a concept as regeneration/resurrection, then allow it to stand for thousands of years without explanation until the meanderings of modern biblical theology finally discovered it. While biblical theology has done much to shore up the unity of Scripture, I fear that its quest for intertextual mystery and sensational "motifs" have taken the discipline too far, all but dismissing local contexts and the understanding of the original writer/reader.

A Difference of Circumstances

Yet another difference in view here is the difference of circumstances that attend the manufacture of Adam and Eve's first and second sets of clothes. In the first instance there is just a frenzied attempt to cover shame. In the latter we have confession, forgiveness, absolution, and hope, the first in a long series of biblical "coverings" in the wake of atonement in Scripture (Job 14:17; Neh 4:5; Ps 85:2; and esp. Ps 32:1 [with Rom 4:7]). There is good reason to suggest, however, that the concepts of atonement and covering are not *synonymous* in nature, but rather *sequential*. That is, atonement is not itself an instance of covering, but an expiatory act that alone can make possible a subsequent mitigation of shame.

I begin discussion of this point with the elephant in the room (though not in our text), viz., the most common Hebrew word for atonement, כָּפַר.[30] A longstanding debate relative to the etymology of this term has stirred for decades, with one side arguing for an Arabic derivation (*kafara*—to cover) and the other side for an Akkadian one (*kapāru*—to wipe off; expiate). The debate will not end with this article, nor does this article plan to add to the discussion already in place. I will simply offer what I see to be the two most significant reasons for preferring the latter: (1) Etymologically speaking, an Akkadian root is almost certainly to be preferred to an Arabic one in that Akkadian is the only option early enough to serve as an informing source for Mosaic usage, upon which an inerrantist must insist. Then, (2) theologically speaking,

[29]Among others, see esp. Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 401–2.

[30]Though the Hebrew word is absent, Sarfati regards the allusion here a clear one, identifying this event as the first act of sacrificial "covering" as atonement (Sarfati, *Genesis Account*, 387).

a "covering" of guilt can never be a legitimate remedy for guilt. As noted above, the only valid remedy for guilt is expiation as a result of a satisfactory payment: our need is not to have our guilt *covered*, but to have it *removed*.[31] Only the latter will do.

For comparison, note the Psalmist's understanding that "covering" one's sin in the immediate aftermath of sin is wrong (Ps 32:5; cf. Prov 28:13). However, after (and only after) the Psalmist expresses *repentance* and *confession* (ידה / ידע—v. 5) and enjoys *expiation* (נָשָׂא—v. 1),[32] the *removal of imputed guilt* (יַחְשֹׁב עָוֹן לוֹ וָה—v. 2), and divine *forgiveness* (עָוֹן נָשָׂאתָ וְאַתָּה—v. 5), the act of "covering sin" becomes one of mercy, relief, and spiritual progress (v. 1).[33] This is precisely the contrast of coverings we find in Genesis 3. In verse 7, Adam and Eve acted criminally by covering themselves prior to God's inquiry and remedy for sin (vv. 8–19) and prior to Adam's confession (v. 20). Afterward, however, the act of covering demonstrated God's mercy in concealing their shame and mitigating further harm. While far simpler than the complex typological sequences detailed above, this explanation cleanly applies the text in a way that would have been comprehensible not only to us who have a completed canon, but also to the *immediate participants themselves* (Adam and Eve). If this is the case (and I prefer it for allowing the text to speak plainly for itself), then the כָּתְנֹת ceases to be the symbol of some abstract biblical-theological motif, but stands rather as a practical aid in the progress of Adam and Eve's sanctification.

The Covering of Skin Further Explained

While the symbolism of the Genesis 3:21 coverings as typological of the sacrificial system, sanctuary and cultic clothing, and ultimately of Christ's crosswork has received steady interest, this understanding is far from universal. Commentators have long seen the clothing as having additional or wholly other symbolism. The earliest Christian commentators saw clothing as punitive in nature: Augustine saw clothes as a punishment for pride; Origen and Ephrem the Syrian as a reminder of mortality; Gregory of Nyssa as an ugly symbol of the disorder wrought by sin.[34] Calvin and Luther had a similarly negative view of these skins

[31]The notion that the OT sacrifices simply covered guilt, layer by layer, much as a landfill does with garbage, is a distressing one, and one that suggests that OT saints did not enjoy true relief from their guilt. Far better than this suggestion is one proposed by John Whitcomb, who sees *real expiation* occurring in the wake of Israel's sacrifices, but strictly in the realm of temporal/theocratic jurisprudence ("Christ's Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel," *Grace Theological Journal* 6 [Fall 1985]: 201–17). A sacrifice that simply "covers" is a worthless one.

[32]*HALOT*, s.v. "נשׂא," 1:726, def. 18.

[33]While beyond the pale of this discussion, it would seem that this observation informs our understanding of 1 Peter 4:8, which calls on NT believers to "cover" the sins of each other. Here is no call to ignore sin, but rather to address sin faithfully, and having done so, to then (and only then) to cover it, i.e., to refuse to raise the sin again.

[34]For clips from these commentaries see Louth, ed., *Genesis 1–11*, 98–99.

as reminders of the Fall and of human mortality.[35] Later commentators have tended to see much more of divine favor in the garments, interpreting them as tokens of divine kindness (e.g., protection from physical and interpersonal vulnerabilities) and reason to hope for yet greater graces.[36] Others have compared them to the priestly garments of Exodus 28, not in typological fashion, but as emblematic of the need to shield God from the sinful finitude of man.[37] Others still see an emphasis on modesty.[38]

The most straightforward answer, however, and that supplied by the words of the text, is that the coverings were designed simply to physically *clothe* (יִלְבִּשֵׁם) Adam and Eve. This verb, used exclusively of people, addresses what H. Fabry calls "the uniquely human need for some kind of covering—not merely for physical protection but to make them 'socially acceptable.'"[39] Clothing enables humans to alleviate their helplessness, to maintain dignity, and to remove distractions so as to "make possible and establish basic interpersonal communication," thus "making life worth living [for Adam and Eve] in spite of their sin."[40] Clothing is God's gift of mercy, having now remedied the legal effects of sin, (1) to alleviate their shame by concealing the constant reminder of their sin and (2) to restrain to some degree the continuing effects of sin.[41] Thus I arrive at my thesis stated earlier, that this clothing event was not symbolic of the redress of *guilt* with a sacrifice of *atonement*, but a literal redress of man's continuing *shame* with an instrument of *mortification*.

That clothing carries metaphorical freight in the Scriptures is admitted (though not, incidentally, in the earliest Hebrew Scriptures),[42]

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[35]Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1–5*, in vol. 1 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 221; John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:181–82. For a modern representative of this understanding see Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 85.

[36]Walton, *Genesis*, 229–30; though the language of sacrifice and atonement is vivid in Waltke's treatment (*Genesis*, 95), he suggests that these other functions for clothing are also in view (90, 92, 103). See also Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 628.

[37]Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 85.

[38]Sarfati, *Genesis Account*, 388; Sarna, *Genesis*, 29; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, Part 1: *From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 163.

[39]*TDOT*, s.v. "לָבַשׁ *lābēš*," 7:460; also Cassuto, *Genesis*, 1:163; Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 82.

[40]*TDOT*, s.v. "לָבַשׁ *lāḇēš*," 7:468, 462, respectively.

[41]See esp. Walton, *Genesis*, 228–29; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 269–70; Kidner, *Genesis*, 72. Perhaps we might offer here a *tertium quid*: clothing reminds us that depravity lies beneath, but mercifully cloaks and restrains it as well.

[42]*TDOT*, s.v. "לָבַשׁ *lābēš*," 7:460.

with humans described as being clothed in glory and honor (Ps 8:6), honor and majesty (Job 40:10), and even righteousness (Job 29:14; Ps 132:0; Isa 61:10; Zech 3:4). In our text, however, the clothing is quite literal, and all attempts to attribute metaphorical meanings to the כֻּתְּנֹת are purely speculative.[43] To summarize in plain terms, the clothing that God made for Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21 is not a *symbol of the remedy for the legal effects of sin* but an *actual mitigation of the practical effects of sin* (i.e., protection from vulnerability and the mitigation of shame).

REPRISE: IMPLICATIONS FOR HERMENEUTICS AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

The material above is a rather sharp push against interpretations of this text that have long been in circulation. And ever since Origen's day, a great many in the scholarly Christian community have attempted to simplify the biblical message into a few sensational threads and motifs that effectively reduce the whole message of Scripture to a set of arrows that point unremittingly to one event: the redemptive work of Christ. If after doing his exegetical work some student of the Scriptures comes to another conclusion about one given OT text or another, it seems, then the prevailing consensus is to send him back to look more closely until he finds some oblique reference to Christ nestled in the white space.

It is my contention that this "Christocentric/Crucicentric" approach has commandeered the already-too-narrow idea of *Heilsgeschichte* and if possible narrowed it still further, effectively closing minds to the plain meanings and robust complexity of message detailed in the actual words especially of Old Testament texts.[44] Be assured that I am not trying to suggest that there are multiple, disconnected story lines in the Bible, that Christ cannot be harmonized with the whole, or that the Scriptures offer multiple ways of salvation in the various dispensations of Scripture. I *am* trying to say that the rich tapestry of Scripture, with its diverse array of persons (some vessels of mercy and others of destruction), angels (elect and evil), other creatures, lands, laws, promises, covenants, kingdoms, prophecies, and other-earthly realms must not be delimited, via typological interpretation, to something less than or other than what they are.

The approach to Genesis 3 that I have attempted to model above is, sadly, unconventional. I admit that this is a sobering prospect to me; still, I am resolved that the approach above is a very sound alternative to typological models that have garnered, in the present generation, a near monopoly on evangelical approaches to biblical theology. Instead of scanning a text for a few select biblical motifs (in our case the "nakedness," "covering," and "clothing" motifs), reading the comprehensive

[43]So Walton, Westermann, Currid, and Heck, *supra*.

[44]For an extremely helpful pushback against this trend I direct the reader to the Fall 2016 issue of *The Masters Seminary Journal*, esp. Abner Chou's "A Hermeneutical Evaluation of the Christocentric Hermeneutic," 113–39.

whole-biblical implications of those motifs into our text under the guidance of the presumptive Gospel *mitte* of Scripture, and then reducing the meaning of that text strictly to the meaning supplied by those motifs, we would do far better to examine the entirety of the text in its local context with a view to the more comprehensive and nuanced categories of systematic theology.