



"Fasting does not change God's hearing so much as it changes our praying."

—Don Whitney

29-May-26

Tearing One's Clothes (Part Two)

In [Part One](#), we considered the ancient, cultural practice of tearing or rending one's clothing to express profound grief, anger, or other strong emotions. We also saw the biblical examples of Joseph's brother, Reuben, and his father, Jacob. There are numerous other examples:

- Hearing of Saul's death, David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him ([II Samuel 1:11](#)).
- Joshua tore his clothes, lamenting that [God](#) had brought the Israelites across the Jordan to be defeated by the Amorites ([Joshua 7:6](#)).
- In exchange for victory, Jephthah made a vow to God to make a burnt offering of the first thing that came out of his house to meet him upon his return. But when he arrived home, he tore his clothes and cried out, "No! Not my daughter! You have brought me to my knees!" ([Judges 11:35](#), [Berean Study Bible](#)).
- In [Acts 14:8-14](#), Paul heals a man crippled from birth just as Jesus had done with a man blind from birth. The people began calling [Barnabas](#)

"Zeus" and Paul "Hermes." When the Priest of Zeus heard this, he brought oxen and garlands to sacrifice, presumably to Paul and Barnabas. When the apostles heard this, they tore their clothes and cried out, "Why are you doing these things?"

A serious aspect of rending one's garments plays a part in the [trial of Jesus Christ](#). [Leviticus 21:10](#) stipulates an exception for Israel's high priest:

He who is the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head *nor tear his clothes*
(Emphasis ours throughout.)

This law's origin is portrayed in the story of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu ([Leviticus 10:1-3](#)). Nadab and Abihu offered profane fire before the Lord, so, in punishment, fire went out from the Lord and devoured them on the spot. Obviously, this event is a personal tragedy for Aaron, who lost the two eldest of his four sons. It would be natural for Aaron—the high priest—to tear his clothes in grief. Nevertheless, [Moses](#) told Aaron, "Do not uncover your head *nor tear your clothes*, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people." Aaron was directed in this regard because in his position, he represented God before the people and could not put his own feelings before the righteous judgment of God.

Now we must jump forward some 1,500 years to [Matthew 26:63-65](#). During the trial of [Jesus Christ](#), Caiaphas, the high priest, *did* tear his garment:

And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"

Jesus said to him, "It is *as* you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man [sitting at the right hand of the Power](#), and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Then the high priest *tore his clothes*, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses! Look, now you have heard His blasphemy!"

Jewish law was so watered-down at that time that, according to *The Mishnah*, allowance was made for the high priest to rend the bottom of his robe at the seam near his feet in cases of sorrow, [mourning](#), and great [offense](#). Other rabbis interpreted that it was not a true tear if it did not break the neckline. *The Mishnah* is a compilation of Jewish oral traditions mostly consolidated during the intertestamental period and written down around AD 200, so it represents the oral law at the time this incident occurred. Some commentators question whether Caiaphas was even legitimately the high priest, being appointed by the Roman procurator, Valerius Gratus. He was certainly not a good one!

God, through the prophet Joel, draws this matter to a spiritual conclusion. After warning about the coming terrible Day of the Lord, He says:

"Now, therefore," says the LORD,
"Turn to Me with all your heart,
With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."
So rend your heart, and not your garments;
Return to the LORD your God,
For He is gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger, and of great kindness;
And He relents from doing harm.
Who knows if He will turn and relent,
And leave a blessing behind Him . . .? ([Joel 2:12-14](#))

This statement in Joel foreshadows the New Covenant and our understanding of [God's will](#) under it, which we often call "the spirit of the law." We do not murder, and in our hearts, we do not hate. We do not steal, and in our hearts, we do not covet. We do not tear our garments in an outward show, but we rend our hearts in true godly sorrow and humility. Tearing one's clothes may be a heart-rending emotional response, spontaneously committed at the moment of tragedy. But to tear our clothes ritualistically is no more [repentance](#) than sacrificing a goat absolves us of [sin](#).

The phrase "tearing your clothes" is a behavioral metaphor for grief, repentance, or humbling oneself, and we should be doing these things when we are commanded to fast on the [Day of Atonement](#) or when we choose to

do so during the year. In fact, tearing one's garments and fasting often appear together when mentioned in Scripture because their underlying spiritual meanings are similar.

We need to meditate on metaphorically tearing our clothes or humbling ourselves. Jesus states in [Matthew 5:4](#), "Blessed are those who mourn." David exemplifies what this means in Psalm 51, his great psalm of repentance. We are sinners. We have nothing to offer, nothing to plead, nothing with which to buy God's favor. Even the clothes on our backs, no matter how much they may have cost, are insignificant compared to the value of our relationship with God, which rests on a foundation of deep humility on our part.

We do not need to tear our clothes. As Joel says, "Rend your heart, and not your garments."

- James C. Stoertz

New Transcripts

[1868-AM: Lessons From Unleavened Bread](#)

Given by Mark Schindler on 08-Apr-26

[1876: Jesus Christ's Ascension](#)

Given by David C. Grabbe on 23-May-26

[1877-AM: Let the Saints be Joyful in Glory!](#)

Given by Martin G. Collins on 24-May-26

[1877-PMs: Seal of Approval](#)

Given by Christian D. Hunter on 24-May-26

[BS-MA23: Matthew \(Part Twenty-Three\)](#)

Given by John W. Ritenbaugh on 12-May-82

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Those Who Mourn](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

While death and grief are extremely destabilizing factors in a person's life, ironically, they are the point events at which most wisdom and character is developed and perfected, as the transformation of Job has attested, and Jeremiah discovered when analyzing Jerusalem's fate in Lamentations. As modern Israel is rapidly learning, to rely on fickle allies (or lovers) rather than the protection of Almighty God releases horrendous curses. Ecclesiastes 7:1-5 demonstrates that hardship or sorrow brings about more lasting wisdom and character than mirth and foolishness. Robert Browning Hamilton, in his poem "Along the Road," declares, "You certainly learn a lot when you walk through troubles, even when you have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death." Jesus Christ assures those who mourn (because of personal bitter experience, or sorrow for all the suffering in the world, or a broken heart from contrition) that they shall be comforted or consoled. In II Corinthians 7:8-10, Paul informs us that worldly sorrow leads to death while godly sorrow leads to repentance and life. Indeed, godly sorrow is a primary aspect of repentance. After godly repentance, sorrow is swallowed up in profound joy. As God's called-out saints, we experience great comfort here and now in our relationship with Christ.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Fasting: Building Spiritual Muscle](#)

by David F. Maas

Though fasting deprives the physical body of nutrition and strength, a proper, biblical fast adds conviction and depth to the inner, spiritual man.

Featured Audio Schedule

Friday Night Bible Study

The next Bible Study (Friday 29-May-26) will be **Divorce and Remarriage**, given by **John W. Ritenbaugh**. The Bible Study will be featured on the [CGG homepage](#) from **6:00 pm Friday** (EST) and all day Saturday.

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