

## *Does Dress Make a Difference?*

***For I [am] the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I [am] holy:***

Today, with great trepidation, I take keyboard in hand (my quill is broken) to write a few words about how we should present ourselves as children of the Most High God. There is no subject extant today that will arouse as much unchristian behavior among God's people as the discussion of this one, unless it is the subject of what constitutes proper music. I leave that for a later occasion. Some wounds must heal before we incur others.

I ask that you bear with me in my trials, and in my feeble attempt to present what the Word of God has to say about proper attire.

Firstly, I should like to hark back to my childhood, simply as a point of reference. Believe it or not, I went to school once. And it wasn't all that long ago, either. I was in high school a mere forty years ago. When I was in high school, all the public (i.e. government) schools had standards of dress for teachers and students. We didn't get to debate them. We had not become so refined as to demand our disrobing rights. We got the privilege of obeying them or being sent home. I should also state that I went to high school in a place where summer lasts for three days in August. The rest of the year is winter.

Be that as it may, the dress code for the female gender strictly forbade pants of any kind. The unwritten rule said that pants might be worn if the snow was over three feet deep in the parking lot, and still coming down. Other than that, skirts or dresses were the only attire allowed for the girls. No sleeveless blouses or dresses, no plunging neck-lines or un-plunging slits, all buttons buttoned, and skirts must come to the knee **WHEN SEATED**. That was even true of the cheerleaders – heresy, you say. Some of the fairer sex would be hard-pressed today to search their closet and find a single garment meeting those criteria. But, as Walter Cronkite would say, "That's the way it was."

Everyone had to wear socks and shoes, unless they were wearing nylon stockings, and boys would be sent home for wearing those. Don't ask me how I know. It was a strain for some families to afford shoes, but those were the rules. I usually got one pair a year, and they got pretty tight by spring. It was a time of great oppression. No shorts allowed. No plain or lettered T-shirts allowed. Teachers followed the same guidelines,

except the male teachers had to wear a shirt and tie. Those were the days!! Of course, every guy had his jackknife and yo-yo. Those are outlawed today, I think.

“Why are you bothering me with all of that?” you may ask. ‘Tis a valid question, to which I reply “To show you how things have changed in a mere forty years.” And perhaps to ask you to address a question such as “If that much has been exposed in the last forty years, what will it be like forty years from now?” Well, we may not have any designers, because there may not be any clothes. Heaven on earth – the garden of Eden all over again.

If there are dress standards in schools today, I fail to see the point of them. You cannot differentiate male from female, since all have the same lack of clothes or sloppy clothes, and the same piercings and tattoos in the same places. And whatever standards there are in school, are left behind as soon as the last bell rings.

Well, this is not about school, is it? This is about God’s people. It is sad that people who claim to be children of God today cannot bring themselves to be as modest as were the children of the world a mere forty years ago. If you attend church today, you best be careful where you sit, and where you look, or you will have a difficult time keeping your mind on the gospel message, if there is one delivered at all. If you stand to sing (some of us still do that), you may find yourself looking at more flesh than one used to find displayed under the street lights on the wrong side of town. And we all turn to number 271 in the Red Book and sing:

“Take my life and let it be, Consecrated Lord to Thee,” when perhaps we should be singing:

“Take my clothes and let them be, enough to cover l’il ole me.”

But we wouldn’t want anything to overly influence our spirituality.

I will try to make this short, but it will probably still be longer than the modern skirt. So I will try to constrain myself to three headings:

1. God’s Truth about clothes.
2. The reason of God’s truth about clothes.
3. The application of God’s Truth about clothes.

That shouldn’t be too difficult, should it?

Now we all know that whenever the preacher even hints at mentioning how we dress, we instantly enter “defense mode.” He can tell us we ought to pray more, and we can agree. He can tell us we ought to give more, and we may grudgingly agree. He can tell us to witness, he can preach against drink, he can rail on adultery and immorality, but we are instantly defensive when it comes to our attire. I have yet to figure that out. Only God knows how much we pray. Only God knows how much we witness. Only God and the treasurer know how much we give. Hopefully, not many find out when we commit adultery. But EVERYONE knows how we dress. Don’t we want to know what God expects? The answer is a resounding “NO.” But we will still be held responsible, so perhaps if the preacher is commanded to declare all the counsel of God, we should just take the plunge (no pun intended) and listen to what God has to say.

Before the preacher even raises the first point, our mind is ready with the first counter-measure, which goes something like this:

“Well, the clothes they wore back then weren’t like ours.”

EXACTLY!! I wonder if God knew that.

This defense usually comes in response to a reading of Deuteronomy 22:5 –

*The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so [are] abomination unto the LORD thy God.*

And our defense is what? Oh, yes, I remember. “Well they all wore robes back then, so how can you tell?” Well, when was “back then?”

Now let’s stop and think about that for a minute. We are arguing that it’s OK for men and women to wear the same thing today because WE can’t tell what the difference was “back then”, even though God said it was an abomination for men and women to dress the same back then. Then let me ask a simple question:

**WHY DID GOD SAY IT IF IT COULD NOT BE OBEYED?** He said it back then. We say there was no difference back then. Would He have said it back then if there were no difference back then? Sometimes we can amaze ourselves with our intelligence. This is not one of those times. Our defense is meaningless – i.e., stupid. God said there were different garments for men and women, and no cross-dressing (trans-vesting, from which we get the word transvestite) was allowed. Do you think God would say the same thing

today, or do you think He has changed His mind? Is the Word of God eternal, or does it only last until we think it needs assistance, or until the styles of the world change?

Seeing that we have such thoroughly sound defenses, perhaps we should move on to the subject at hand.

## 1. GOD'S TRUTH ABOUT CLOTHES

God's truth about clothes is that they were made to cover – not to uncover, and they were made to distinguish the sexes and God's people. Whatever the current style or fashion, the child of God should be covered, and we should be able to distinguish the sexes by the covering – not the uncovering. How much should be covered? Everything that God says needs to be covered should be covered.

Let's look at the first time people were covered, because those clothes were designed by God. Ralph Lauren was not around to give his advice. Adam and Eve had sinned. When that happened, they “knew” or “discovered” that they were naked. They were naked before, but it did not become a major issue until they “knew” about it. Now that they knew it, they were ashamed. The serpent's prophecy had come true (Gen. 3:5), they knew good from evil, they had been able to discern that what they were now doing was evil, and they were ashamed.

Genesis 3:7-8

*And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they [were] naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where [art] thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I [was] naked; and I hid myself.*

It seems that, today, people get as naked as they can get, and are not ashamed. Adam and Eve would have hidden themselves. Remember, they had already made themselves clothes, probably had more covered than your average beach-goer, and still felt very uncomfortable about the situation. They hid from God because they were naked, even though they had something on.

God says you can have something on and still be naked. And nakedness is to be a symbol of shame. They had made themselves garments (aprons) that probably covered

them from at least the mid-section to the knees (and perhaps from the arms to the knees), and yet they were still ashamed. Nakedness became a symbol of shame:

Exodus 32:25

*And when Moses saw that the people [were] **naked**; (for Aaron had made them **naked** unto [their] shame among their enemies:)*

Isaiah 20:4

*So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, **naked** and barefoot, even with [their] buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.*

Revelation 16:15

*Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed [is] he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk **naked**, and they see his shame.*

Now, as we have already mentioned, you can be “clothed” and be naked. In James 2:15-16, God tells us that if a brother or sister be naked, and we don’t help them out with some clothes, we are not profitable. He’s not talking here about people who don’t have a stitch of clothes on their body. Those people would have been arrested. He’s talking about people who don’t have ENOUGH to properly cover their bodies.

In John 21:7, Peter was fishing when he saw the Lord on the shore.

*Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt [his] fisher's coat [unto him], (for he was **naked**,) and did cast himself into the sea.*

The scripture says that Peter was naked, but Peter was not without clothes. The apparel of those times for men was a relatively light-weight undergarment that came from the shoulders to approximately the thigh, and then an outer cloak or coat (like Joseph’s coat of many colors). Peter, in order to be freer to work, and because there were no females or important people present, had shed his outer cloak. That was considered nakedness by the scripture, but he was more clothed than the average surfer today. When he saw the Lord, he made sure he was not just covered, but covered properly. There is a difference between being covered and being properly covered, as far as God is concerned. And it is a shame to be uncovered.

God made a coat for Adam and one for Eve.

*Genesis 3:21 Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*

God didn't clothe Eve and let Adam run around with nothing on. Some folks today put all the burden on the woman, but God covered them both. I guess He thought it was a good thing to be covered.

So what have we learned so far? We have learned that men and women are to be covered, and that they are to be covered the way God says, and not the way man says. They are to be covered differently. The bible does not say that Adam's coat was exactly like Eve's coat, but it does say it was the purpose that was important, and the purpose was to cover.

## 2. THE REASON OF GOD'S TRUTH ABOUT CLOTHES

When God does something, He has at least one reason. We may not know what it is, but there is always at least one. We will now look to see if we can find, within the Word of God, reasons for the commands that God gave about wearing clothes.

God's people are supposed to want to please God, and not men.

I Thessalonians 4:1

*Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, **and** exhort [you] by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk **and** to please God, [so] ye would abound more **and** more.*

Is it too much to ask for one who claims to be a blood-bought saint to look like one? To act like one? To talk like one? So, in the manner of our dress, if God just hints at something, we should be studying the thing to see if there is something we should be doing. In this case, we should be getting dressed.

The first reason we will mention for wearing godly attire is to differentiate between the sexes. God didn't want a unisex society. He made man, and then he made woman. He only made two types, and he had (and still has) distinct ideas about the roles of each. That subject may have to be reserved for another time. Today we are discussing the dress of each. We know that He did not want them dressed the same.

*Deuteronomy 22:5 The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so [are] abomination unto the LORD thy God.*

If something is an abomination to God, that is a pretty strongly worded statement of how God feels about it. And here is where our built-in defense mechanism instantly surfaces. “Oh, here we go, he’s going to get on that pants thing again.” Well, we might as well face it. Why try to skirt the issue (great pun, by the way)?

Not so long ago, all nurses that you would see in a hospital wore uniforms consisting of dresses. Not any more. Not so long ago, if a woman applied for an office job, she was told that she needed to wear dresses. Not so any more. Female teachers wore dresses. They were teaching by example. There used to be a saying not so long ago, when the woman of the house would get out of her place, that someone would say “Well, I guess we know who wears the pants in that family.” We can’t say that any more, because everyone wears the pants in the family.

God put a difference in the sexes in the way they looked, and in the way He wanted them to dress. There was a reason. He did not want Nancy to feel or look like Bill, and did not want Bill to feel or look like Nancy. A boy needs to understand he is a boy, and a girl needs to understand that she is a girl. One of the most wonderful ways to make that distinction early enough in life is to dress boys like boys and girls like girls. Before they can even talk about it, they know there is a difference because of the way they are dressed. Girls are dressed like mommy, and boys are dressed like daddy, and there is to be a difference. I don’t believe you can discuss modesty in clothing without discussing this issue because, for the most part, pants on women are not modest. Especially the way they wear them now, which seems to be for the express purpose of displaying the tattoo they have on their backsides. What good is having a tattoo if you can’t show it off? If you ladies who are reading this believe your pants are modest, I suggest you put them on, stand in front of a mirror, turn around, bend over (if you can), and look behind you.

God’s reason for dress was to preserve moral and social order. If the women kept themselves covered, men would not run their camels into one another looking at something that shouldn’t be shown. This does not depend on style – it just depends on choosing something that appropriately covers what should be covered.

Now back to that argument that they all wore the same kind of clothes. If you look at how the middle-easterners dress today, you will see that the “same clothes” argument is ridiculous. Men wore an under-garment, a rough outer coat, a girdle (John the Baptist’s

was made of leather, remember?) usually some sandals, and many time a head-wrap (especially if it was hot). The ladies wore long, flowing garments made of entirely different material, normally consisting of many layers of soft, colored material, and wrapped around them, and over their heads. You could instantly tell the difference between men's apparel and women's apparel. It was not difficult at all.

Men, when they went to war or to work, many times "girded up their loins," or turned their shorter outer robes into something that looked like pants, so they were freer to move, run, and flee if the enemy got too close.

OK, that was the Old Testament. You say "But this is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Yes, and God is still God. Styles may change, but God does not change. Women are to be feminine and men are to be masculine. The line is not to be crossed, and to do so is an abomination to God. God, to my knowledge, has never LOWERED a standard. And He does not change. Do you think that God would tell those poor folks back in the Old Testament that doing something would be an abomination, and then there would come a time when He would say that it doesn't make a difference any more? It's OK now, but it was an abomination then? I don't think so. I don't like okra now, and I don't expect to ever like it. Some things don't change.

Men should be very much concerned that they not look like women, and women should be very much concerned that they not look like men. The blurring of sexual distinctions has led to immorality in the world today, and I don't have time to pursue that issue at the moment.

The second reason God cares about our clothes is that He wants us appropriately attired. We will talk a little more about this under our third heading, but suffice it to say that clothes send a message. That was true in the Old Testament, and it's true today. If you read Genesis, chapter 38, you'll find that God killed Tamar's husband because he was wicked, and his brother took her to wife, as was the established law. God slew him also. Tamar then got upset because her father-in-law would not give his youngest son to her as a husband. If you read the story, you will see that Tamar changed her dress to that of a harlot, and created quite a stir among the people. She knew that clothes made a difference, just like we know that clothes make a difference. The difference between them and us is that we won't admit it. A woman dressed inappropriately will get the attention she desires, even if she claims she doesn't desire it. But dressing like a harlot has the effect of making people think you are one. Girls run around with various body parts exposed, and then complain if the wrong guy makes the wrong move. They do not, however, complain if the right guy makes one. Therein lies the problem. Any time a



young lady is dressed in an inappropriate fashion, it is an advertisement to look. Looking creates desire. And we need not proceed any farther.

So God has reasons for His truth about clothes, and two of the most important ones are to distinguish the sexes and to prevent unwarranted and illegal behavior.

Proverbs 11:22

*[As] a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, [so is] a fair woman which is without discretion.*

### **3. THE APPLICATION OF GOD'S TRUTH ABOUT CLOTHES**

God is eternal. Styles may change, times may change, materials may change, fabrics may change, but God does not change. His requirements do not change. That means that, no matter what the materials we have to work with, or what the custom or style, we can comply with God's requirements, and we should do so because we care about what God thinks.

Here is the application verse we will use:

I Timothy 2:9

*In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;*

In Paul's day, the ladies in the gentile churches (Timothy was the pastor at Ephesus) would attempt to out-do one another in ornamentation. That would almost be a refreshing relief today, but I digress. They spent hours twining their hair, and spent money on lavish wardrobes of finery, just to they could look more prosperous than someone else. That was the problem in the churches of that day. But God knew that there would also be problems centuries later, with people who did not want to wear anything, so this verse can be used to cover the whole issue.

Clothes must be worn with a sense of shamefacedness. We already have shown that it was a shame to be naked, and that you can be naked and still be clothed. You can show legs, backs, and other things that should not be displayed publicly. The clothes that are worn should reflect the knowledge that some things are not appropriate. Some things are a shame. Some things should be covered the way God says they should be covered. These are the types of clothes that should be worn.

Clothes must be worn with a sense of sobriety. It's difficult to be sober when June shows up busting out all over. Sobriety means soundness of mind and judgment. It shows unsound judgment to wear things that God says should not be worn. It shows unsound judgment for the fairer sex to wear things that they know will attract the attention of the opposite sex in the wrong way and to the wrong areas. Yes, God looks on the inside, but everyone else has to look at the outside. The outside should be attractive in a modest, shamefaced, sober, acceptable way. No, ladies, you do not have to look like a washer woman in public. But you do not have to look like a man or a harlot, either. There is an alternative, and it's God's alternative.

Lastly, Paul says that women should adorn themselves in "modest apparel."

The definition of the word modest, in every dictionary you will find, will include the word "decent." The clothing is to be decent. Decent means it does not reveal or accentuate the wrong things.

The word apparel is a particularly interesting word. It does not mean just "clothing." It is a completely different word than the word "clothing" as it appears in other scriptures. It is the Greek word "*Katastolle*." The root word means "to fall or let down – to flow down." The second part of the word is the word from which we get the word "stole." It means to wrap around. Paul is stating in a quite straightforward manner, that the fairer sex is to wear something that is long and flowing. It's what God wants. You can apply that to any culture, any style, any time in history, and it can be applied the same way. It's interesting how God works it out like that.

I'm not sure if the clothes make the man or the woman, or if the man or woman makes the clothes. But I know that God has a lot to say about the subject of clothing, and it would be nice if we, who claim to be God's people, would apply some of it.

No, dressing modestly will not get you into heaven, but I guarantee you that everyone in heaven will be dressed modestly.

God Bless,  
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