

# Principles of Dress for Christians

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## INTRODUCTION:

Let me present a hypothetical case to you and ask how you would handle it: Suppose YOU were a gospel preacher and you had just preached a lesson appealing to Christians to be more careful about dressing modestly. After you complete your lesson, someone comes to you and says, "Preacher, you wasted your time today. You harped on a matter that the Lord said we should not be concerned about."

You might say, "What do you mean?" He answers, "Haven't you ever read Matt. 6:25? Jesus said, 'Take no thought for your life... nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?' Therefore Christ was telling us that clothes do not matter."

How would you deal with that? No doubt you would point out his obvious misapplication of the passage---that it is dealing primarily with the futility of anxiety. After explain the Lord's statement in its true context, no doubt you would proceed to the principles we hope to explore more in detail in this lesson.

It is true that, "Clothes do not determine character." It is also true that, "Character determines the clothing one wears."

Apparently many Christians do not give serious consideration to their adornment and yet there are some important Bible principles that regulate the dress of Christians. We will explore some of those principles in this lesson, but first we need to establish and clarify one very important fact:

## I. IT WAS GOD'S IDEA FOR HUMANS TO BE PROPERLY CLOTHED.

- A. Genesis 3:7 This is perhaps one of the most familiar passages in the Bible, known frequently by people who know nothing else about the Bible. True, after their sin, Adam and Eve "sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons..." --but the full story does not end here.
- B. Gen. 3:10-11, 21. Adam was not comfortable in the presence of God without clothing; apparently God regarded it as improper also because, "'Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them."
- C. Obviously, nakedness within itself is not always wrong or else one could not even take a bath! No one is trying to say that the wonderful human body God has made is inherently obscene. And yet the improper public display of one's self in a public manner is regarded as a shame for those who would honor God:
  1. 2 Sam. 10: 1-4 When David's enemies wanted to shame his servants, they cut off their garments to expose them to the public.
  2. Isaiah 20:4 Captured slaves were humiliated by being made naked with their buttocks uncovered. Cf. Rev. 3:18 and 16:15
- D. The obvious conclusion is that one should dress in such a manner as to avoid this shame.

## II. SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES OF DRESS FOR CHRISTIANS.

A. One should keep himself clean.

1. "... let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."
2. The expression, "Cleanliness is next to godliness" is not a Bible quote, but the sentiment is not foreign to the Bible. (That expression is attributed to John Wesley. )
3. Since one is to work and earn his living by the "sweat of his brow", there will be temporary occasions when bodily dirt is honorable. The general emphasis, however, for the Christian will be personal and moral cleanness.
4. A little boy was late to school, but he had an excuse: "I over-washed myself!"
5. U.S. Doctors in several large cities recently reported epidemics of scabies (itch). This seems unbelievable in an enlightened society, but the hippie culture was conducive to it.

Illust. A story of unknown origin has appeared in many bulletins about a group of cannibals who opened a supermarket to accommodate natives who were too busy to find their own victim. A sign said, "Missionaries, 35 cents per lb." Another sign said, "Hippies, \$2.98 a lb." One of them questioned why the hippies would be so much higher. The answer: "Have you ever tried to clean one of those things?"

B. One's dress should not be an intentional discomfort to the poor, resulting in respect of persons.

1. James 2:1-5, 9 These verses teach that one must not show contempt to another whom God loves by letting dress be a determining factor of acceptance.
2. John 7:24 "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment ..."
3. 1 Samuel 16:7 - "...man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."
4. Hambone said once, "A stranger showed up at church yesterday. He put a \$20 bill in the collection plate, and everybody nearly howdy-dooded him to death."

C. One's dress should conform to God's requirement of modesty.

1. 1Tim. 2:9-10 "... women adorn themselves with modest apparel . . ."
2. 1 Peter 3:2-4 This emphasizes the things a Christian woman depends on to make herself attractive---to God and good men. It does not prohibit appropriate hair arrangements or jewelry any more than it would prohibit clothes: ("putting on of apparel"). It is saying: Cultivate the inner beauty of personality rather than depend on the outward things that will fade, and then use the external accessories modestly or with restraint.
3. These verses are God's lessons on beauty culture. He has more to say to women than men. Perhaps he knew men couldn't look much better or that women might be prone to go to extremes. The word modest comes from the same root word from which we get and moderate, and mode (that which is common to the greater number of people). We have tended to restrict the word modest to scant clothing only, but it could refer to overdoing dress as well---and probably meant that in its original sense above. Often, women were impulsively divorced by insensitive husbands; they would be sent away with only what they were wearing. Women

without character who married men without character tried to protect themselves by overdressing, gaudily, wearing elaborate clothing and much gold and jewelry woven into their hair. Christians were told to be what they should be as Christians and they would not have to go to those extremes. Modesty can include scant clothing since it would not be common to the greater number of decent women but it could refer to the other extreme as well.

4. Someone has said, "Be not the first by whom the new is tried; neither be the last to lay the old aside." Christians do not have to stubbornly resist fashion and style if it is in good taste and conforms to other Christian principles, but they do not need to be slaves to style either. Styles have changed (and will change) through the years. Christians must know when styles violate other principles such as those we are studying in this lesson.

D. One's dress must not be provocative of lust.

1. Matthew 5:27-28 A woman's dress can provoke lust in men. Many mothers need to understand this better and teach their daughters.
2. It is not enough to say the man should control his thoughts; one who presents the temptation may be accountable for being a stumbling block.
3. Generally, males have been the "peeping toms" and females have been the "exhibitionists". This may account for God giving the warning as he does, since He made them both and knows their natures.

E. One's dress should be protective of his body and his health.

1. Romans 12:1-3 The body is a living sacrifice offered to God.
2. Cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20
3. A word of caution may be applicable here to the wise Christian: Warnings are being sounded about the damaging effects of the sun to the skin, causing not only wrinkled leathery skin that shows up later with irreversible damage but same types of cancer, including melanoma which can be terminal. Clothing is designed to protect the body.

F. One's dress should avoid harmful influence to the church and one's personal influence.

1. 1 Cor. 10:32 "Give none offence ... to the church of God."
2. The principles of Romans 14 and 1 Cor. 8 indicate that personal actions of Christians can become a stumbling block to others.
3. It is also true, however, that sometimes the church may be unfairly blamed. Often a church will try to reach children in the community and little ones will attend VBS in the only clothing they have. There should be tolerance and patience as we try to teach. (But are we teaching them any better?)

Illust. On one occasion a visiting preacher completed his lesson in a gospel meeting and went to the entrance of the lobby — while the local minister made lengthy closing announcements. An out-of-state traveler came in the lobby and asked if he knew where a local person lived. He explained that he was new and did not know but that if he would wait a moment or so, the local people, after dismissal would be glad to tell him. He said, "Would it be alright if my daughter came in to use your wash room?" He assured him it would. A teenage girl in very scant attire came in — and while she was in the rest room, the audience was dismissed and filled the lobby just in time to meet her as she came out to return to her car. They did not know the

circumstances, but it caused quite an uproar before the full story could be explained! Yet it was not a matter they could have helped.

4. The church is responsible for teaching and setting good example and taking a stand. Its members need to reinforce that stand with respect to the truth, not only in worship but wherever the members are.
- G. One's dress should respect the distinction God has made in the male-female image.
1. It was God who established some principles that apply: Cf. 1 Cor. 11:3, 14-15 . There are still many arguable points in this chapter that may never be settled fully for everyone, but it does teach a distinction between males and females.
  2. Just as a curiosity, let us read Rev. 9:7-8: " ... and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men . And they had hair as the hair of women .... "
- Of course of this is in a figurative setting, but is it again suggesting some male/female characteristics that the world is considering too lightly in its stampede to erase distinctions?
3. Genuine masculinity and genuine femininity have never worked to the disadvantage of any conscientious Christians.

Illust. Does this prohibit pant suits for women? Deut. 22:5 was a part of the OT law not applicable to us, but it would not prohibit such for women any more than v. 11 would prohibit preachers from wearing mixed clothing or v. 9 would restrict planting multiple seeds in a garden.

Ladies pant suits can still be feminine clothing in spite of their similarity to men's clothing. The robes of Bible days were similar and so were their sandals. Today, both wear socks, shoes, hats, coats, etc. which are similar though different.

A preacher who flatly condemned ladies pant suits was given one by one of the ladies. She felt that since he objected to her wearing "men's" clothing that it would be sinful to throw it away. He refused to wear it (though he had called it men's clothing"), yet felt that she should not either.

4. As with other clothing, there may still be appropriate times and places for different types of apparel, but the distinction is still to be observed.
- H. One's dress should still respect the personal preferences of others where no law- is binding.
1. 1 Cor. 10:29 The principle of this verse suggests an area of personal liberty: "...why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?"
  2. These verses indicate an area of personal preference, e.g. a vegetarian vs. a meat eater. If no Bible principle is violated, there is a realm where we must not bind a personal preference on another.
  3. This can be true with clothing. Some prefer certain colors others cannot stand. Some like bow ties and others no tie at all. Some like leisure suits and others do not. As long as the general principles of modesty are observed, we should respect the right of others and make no test of fellowship over such.
  4. How does this apply to gospel preachers? Is there an area, however, where their dress still should enhance their work and broaden the effectiveness of their ministry?

And to what extent would this apply to all Christians?

a. Did you know that detailed research has been carried out to ascertain the effects of dress on the impact it has on people we meet? Researchers have learned that beige raincoats effect response more than black. Secretaries in offices without dress codes were late or absent 3 to 5 percent more often, stayed at desks 5% less and at typewriters 5% less than in offices where dress codes existed. People seemed to identify ministers more with 2-piece suits than with 3-piece, and considered them to be speaking with more authority if they dressed in conventional, conservative dress.

Ironically young people "turn off" stereo-typed ministers with greasy hair, out-of-style width ties and "preacher black" suits and shoes, even though the experts seem to go with some of the traditional garb!

b. Illust. Two young men showed great promise as preachers. One said, "I might personally like to wear my hair a little longer and dress a little less conservatively, but I realize that the church is composed of older people whom I might alienate and I can't be concerned only about being a hit with the teenagers. I try to strike a happy medium and be the preacher the broad membership of the church can respect. I feel I can still relate to the youth without trampling the feelings of the older ones."

The other seemed to take the position that the old-fogey mossbacks in the church need to be educated to a freer life style. He seemed to be obsessed with going the route of extreme dress, hair style, etc. to "relate" to the teenagers. As he got older he did not realize that he was freakish to try to be one of them and resist acting his age. He alienated the older members and eventually the young ones laughed behind his back, too.

Which of these would you assume is the one who has grown and become more widely used and respected? And which would you assume is no longer used in any way in the church? The obvious conclusion is the right one.

5. True, there is a personal realm in which others should not bind our liberty. There is also the realm where Christians must not reduce their own effectiveness by insisting on a defiant role to wholesome customs and expectations.

6. 1 Tim. 4:12 "Let no man despise thy youth: but be thou an example of the believers..."

## **CONCLUSION:**

These are not all of the principles that perhaps apply. More could be explored concerning these, but they give us a basis for further study.

One type of clothing is more important than all of these: A robe that is washed white in the blood of the Lamb.

In Rev. 3:4-5 Jesus promises that those who are victorious can be clothed in white raiment and not have their names blotted out of the book of life.

Our faith and obedience enable us to have that blessing.