

## How Should a Christian Dress?

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Is this a legalistic question and topic? Most Christians in modern evangelicalism would become immediately disgruntled if they heard any teaching on the subject of proper attire or dress for Christians. The charge of legalism (forcing manmade laws or rules on other people) would immediately be assigned to such a topic as this. However, the Bible does give some timeless principles concerning the dress of God's people. We must remember that there are timeless ethical principles that span all the dispensations and which are applicable to God's people of all ages. God's moral laws do not change and there are certain ethical principles that remain intact throughout all time. All too often, any kind of preaching about clothing has become an oddity and an embarrassment. But we must get beyond this mentality and remember that clothing is a language. Clothing makes a statement. The way we dress still does portray a message to others. So how we dress is still important in the midst of an existentialistic culture that has virtually no limits and standards of decency. How we dress can and should be part of our holiness unto the Lord since we are to "be holy in all manner of conversation" or living according to 1 Peter 1:15. There are practical aspects of holiness that pertain to the manner in which we dress.

Let me just say that the subject of Christian dress has generated more heat than light. In other words, there has been more fighting and nitpicking over this topic than Scriptural understanding. There have also been some fanatical interpretations and misapplications of various Biblical texts regarding dress and Christian adornment. So in this study we want to look at those Biblical passages that bring out the issue of Christian apparel and adornment with the intent of discovering the actual meaning of these passages. May God give us an open mind and receptive heart as we speak on this topic of dress. May we say with the Psalmist, "Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth (Ps. 86:11).

There are some general principles and guidelines concerning the matter of dress that are trans-dispensational and trans-cultural.

## **1. The Bible teaches that dress should always be modest.**

1 Timothy 2:9 says:

“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.”

A woman should not flaunt herself before men by the way she dresses and presents herself.

Earl states:

“The Christian woman is not to adorn herself with ‘gold or pearls or expensive clothes’ so as to draw attention to herself. At worst, this is what the prostitutes did. At best, it shows pride and self-centeredness, both of which are contrary to the spirit of Christ. Such dress is especially unbecoming in church.”

Scripture singles out women as dressing modestly because of the enticing sway that women naturally have over men. But the principle of modesty pertains to both sexes. Both men and women must use discretion today in the matter of outward apparel. This verse covers the issue of women dressing modestly when saying, “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.”

The adjective “modest” (kosmios) means to be dressed in an orderly and well-arranged fashion. The opposite of this word would mean to be dressed in a chaotic fashion that is unbecoming to a woman. We would say that a woman should dress in good taste. The well-grooming of a woman should never violate a proper sense of modesty. The adjective “modest” is a cognate (related word that comes from the same root) of the verb “adorn” (kosmeo) and this word (“adorn”) also means “to arrange” or “put in proper order” and speaks of the woman’s apparel being well-arranged with proper taste and modesty. A woman’s apparel should be properly arranged. It should be planned, orderly, of good taste, modest, and beautiful. The word translated “modest” (1 Tim. 2:9) simply means that woman’s clothing should be “decent and orderly.” The woman’s wardrobe

should be filled with clothing that does not expose her body and which represent her as a woman of virtue instead of vice.

The woman's attitude and thinking concerning her dress is also very important. This is explained in the next words. The word "shamefacedness" (aidos) means that the character of a woman must be full of humility, bashfulness, and reverence toward God so as to demonstrate obedience to His design for a woman's dress. The word would convey how a woman's humble attitude should cause her to shrink away from anything that would even suggest immodesty and indecency. The word "sobriety" (sophrosune) means that a woman should use good sound judgment in dressing. She must think correctly when dressing knowing the kind of message she is conveying by her dress. The word indicates that a Christian woman or girl should give careful thought to what she should wear, how she should dress, what clothing she selects, and the overall appearance that she should present to others. She is to dress sensibly. A sober mind will protect a woman from worldly and immodest display.

A woman should not cloth herself with the "attire of a harlot" (Prov. 7:10). Modesty is to be the woman's prime concern in relationship to her apparel. Her attire is the expression of her tastes, interests, and even character. The manner in which a woman dresses indicates a great deal about what sort of woman she is. So modesty is an important issue in dress. Of course, this issue is important for all Christians – both men and women. A woman is given specific instruction in this regard because of her ability to seduce men and lead them astray.

As a lady, God expects you to cover up and not show off your body to the eyes of a watching world. Ladies are not to dress in a manner where they invite men to lust at them. God is addressing a woman's modesty simply because of a woman's natural attraction to men. Ladies, God holds you accountable for the way that you dress. How you dress sends a message to everyone around you. Certainly there is no exact line one can draw concerning modesty but one thing is certain. When you dress to be seen and showy you can be sure that you have crossed the line. Ladies, there is a difference between being feminine and being sexually expressive in your dress and mannerisms. The world says, "Dress sexy, dress to be seen, live

free.” But God says, “Dress modest, don’t live to be seen, don’t show off the nakedness of your body.”

David Cloud, a fundamental preacher, has written on the topic of dress. He said something that is worthy of consideration: “Christian husband and father, when your wife or daughter goes out in public, is she causing men to lust after her by the way she is dressed? Many reply, ‘That is not your business.’ I contend that the way women dress IS the business of men other than their husbands and fathers. Men have to look at women, and if they are dressed immodestly it is a tremendous battle not to lust after them. Man was created with a powerful desire toward the woman, and the fall has placed adulterous thoughts in the heart of man (Matthew 15:19).”

Elsewhere Cloud writes:

“What is modest clothing? Consider, what is attractive to a man? The woman’s shape, for one thing. If she wears clothing which accentuates her figure, she is causing men’s attention to be drawn to that part of her, and I contend that she is causing men to lust.”

You cannot deny what this brother says even if you don’t agree with all of his conclusions about dress. It’s also true that one cannot measure modesty by inches or become a dictating tyrant inspecting every piece of clothing a person wears. I have heard how one particular church told the attending women what kind of undergarments to wear! Quiet frankly, it’s nobody’s business what kind of undergarments a man’s wife wears! The point is this. Every woman makes the decision how she dresses and the message she wants to convey by her dress. A Christian woman should never forget about God’s timeless principle of modesty. Ladies, do not go into the realm of what’s questionable. You should want to please God in all that you do – even your dress (John 8:29). Ladies, it’s important to teach our young generation of girls about the modesty issue. You need to remind them that holiness gets down to the way we dress and whether or not we are flaunting ourselves before a lust-crazed society. If the heart is right, the clothing will be right.

It’s interesting that reference is made to linen undergarments, the purpose of which was to protect the modesty of the priests (Ex. 28:42–43). This reminder of the shame of nakedness associated with

the Fall was in striking contrast to the demeanor of pagan priests who often performed their duties naked. The point is this. God has always been concerned with modesty. Certainly the principle of modesty applies to men as well. Some of these fellows today want to wear their trousers below their belt line and wear clothing that is indecent and immodest. A man has no more a right to dress immodest than does a woman. God wants us to remember that our garments should be “holy garments” (Exodus 28:2) in relationship to our manner of dress.

Proverbs 11:22 says, “As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.” The word discretion means to have proper taste. It connotes that a person will use proper judgment and have right understanding about purity and moral living. Sadly, the woman mentioned in this illustration lacks good moral taste and judgment in the way she dresses and presents herself in society. She flaunts herself and in doing so becomes like a pig wearing a ring in its nose. There is an inappropriate relationship between the woman's beauty and her lack of moral purity or good taste. This is pictured by the beauty of a gold ring that does not match a pig's snout. Her physical beauty should match her moral discretion.

Israelite women wore nose rings for ornamental purposes, like earrings and rings on fingers today. In Proverbs 11:22 we have two incongruities, the gold ring in the swine's snout, and the beautiful woman who has no discretion. Ladies, don't get mad at me but there is a parallel between a pig's snout and the woman who has no discretion. *The Bible likens the ring to the physical beauty of a woman and her lack of discretion to a pig's snout.* So ladies, when you seek to live in an indiscreet manner you are like a pig wearing a ring in its nose! Your physical beauty does not match with your moral beauty or discretion. They are opposites in every way. So the indiscreet woman who lacks good moral judgment and sense is compared to a pig wearing a gold earring. She is likened to a pig no matter what her outward appearance might be. Outward female beauty with indiscreet conduct is valueless and morally ugly.

**2. The Bible teaches that we should never dress in a manner that draws attention to ourselves.**

1 Timothy 2:9 one again says:

“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.”

Of course, some have used this verse to teach that a woman should never use gold or jewelry. This is not true at all. Paul did not forbid the use of jewelry but rather the excessive, showy, and prideful use of them as substitutes for the true beauty of “a meek and quiet spirit” (1 Peter 3:1-6). This has always been the emphasis in Scripture regarding the outward adornment for women. A woman should never use excessive jewelry to draw attention to herself. There is an artificial glamour of the world that does not last and there is also the true beauty of a godly life that lasts. *Godly living is more important than glamour.* This is an important reminder.

In this passage we are also taught about avoiding extremes in our outward appearance and dress (“not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array”). This text does not mean a woman cannot fix up her hair, wear jewelry, or dress in a manner that is becoming to a woman. Other Bible texts would nullify that conclusion and interpretation. This text simply means that a woman should not make her hair and clothing, her outward appearance, the main emphasis of her life. *Peter is talking about the abuse of dress and outward adornment.* Many women deck themselves with fine jewelry, gold, costly array (dress) to impress others and get others to notice them. Their goal is to be noticed by others and let others know what they are worth and how charming they are. This type of outward emphasis is nothing more than the pride of life (1 John 2:15-16).

1 Peter 3:3 echoes the same truth of overdressing:

“Whose adorning let it not be that outward *adorning* of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel.”

Some have erroneously interpreted this verse to mean that women should not wear jewelry. However, if this were the proper interpretation Peter would also be advocating that women should not wear clothing! The Bible is teaching an important principle about dress in this verse and it's this. Dress should be without ostentatious display. In other words, we should not try to draw attention to

ourselves by the way we dress. Such things as jewelry, clothing, and hair are clearly mentioned as the possible causes of excess in outward adornment. This is because when a woman applies herself to these outward adornments in excess she begins to lose sight of what is most important in her life. Outward adornments of beauty are right if they are kept in check and not overdone. In any event, discussing these feminine details of adornment does not make one a legalist, who is trying to ramrod people with extra-biblical rules, which have no bearing on Christian living. The Biblical texts talk about these issues and the abuse of them. In relationship to a woman's hair, gold, pearls, jewelry, and clothing God is saying, "Don't overdo it." Some of the ladies were apparently coming to church looking like fashion models and both Paul and Peter condemn the excess of outward adornment.

Halley's Bible Handbook stated it well:

"We do not understand 1 Peter 3:3, 4 to prohibit a woman's desire to be attractive in personal appearance, but rather a caution against overdoing it, remembering that no amount of finery can be a substitute for a gracious Christian personality."

Peter is not condemning the wearing of certain apparel or outward adornment but the misuse of outward adornment or apparel. Piper remarks that the point of Peter "is not to warn against something intrinsically evil, but to warn against its misuse as an expression of self-exaltation or worldly-mindedness." These statements of excess in 1 Timothy 2:9 and 1 Peter 3:3 do not mean that a woman should look drab and dingy for her husband (Song of Solomon 1:10; 4:1-7). Paul and Peter are simply saying that a woman should not overdo it when it comes to externals remembering that she needs to concentrate on her true beauty, which is her godly living (1 Pet. 3:3).

I once saw a woman wearing earrings that were as big as her face. She was clearly seeking to be a spectacle before others. The Bible teaches that a woman should not flaunt herself before others by going overboard in her outward appearance and dress. She is not to become a walking fashion show before the world. Every woman should display good taste in the clothing that she wears, not drawing undue attention to herself and to her body. Actually, a woman can express extremism or excess in both directions - the past out-of-date

fashions, or the present trends of revealing apparel. No, you don't have to wear clothing from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. *You can actually be in fashion without becoming a fashion model.* The old advice is good: "Be not the first by whom the new is tried, nor yet the last to lay the old aside." In other words, don't be an oddball, but dare to be different when you need to be different, for the sake of modesty and conservatism, as opposed to extravagance.

One can read Isaiah 3:16–25 to see what God thinks about all forms of extravagant adornment.

"Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: Therefore the LORD will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of *their* tinkling ornaments *about their feet*, and *their* cauls, and *their* round tires like the moon, The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels, The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils. And it shall come to pass, *that* instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; *and* burning instead of beauty. Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war."

The outward extravagance and showiness of clothing or apparel without an inner spiritual devotional life is absolutely appalling to God (Matt. 23:27). The point is this. God has never been impressed with outward display, excesses in outward adornment, and prideful presentation.

1 Peter 3:4 puts the emphasis where it needs to be:

"But *let it be* the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."



In this particular section of Scripture Peter mentioned the importance about the inward spiritual life of a person. The “inner man” (the spiritual center of a person’s life and existence) is of utmost importance but at the same time Peter spoke about the outward man and his dress (1 Pet. 3:3). This should tell us that both are important to God and the one (the inner man) will affect the other (the outer man or outward appearance). We might also remember that the outward man is often a reflection of what the inward man is like. The way we live, act, and dress will often tell the story of what’s going on inside of us. More on this later.

For now, let’s catch Peter’s main point. Don’t go overboard when you dress and attempt to draw attention to yourself. *You can look pretty without being a peacock!* You can be up-to-date without glamorizing yourself to impress others. You can dress in style without dressing to the hilt. You can enhance your face with make-up without replacing your face! Conservatism in your outward appearance and dress is the main issue. Avoid extremes. While the world prizes costly clothing and gold jewelry, a woman with a gentle and quiet spirit is precious to God. Peter did not state that women should not wear jewelry and nice clothes, but that Christian wives should not think of outer attire as the source of genuine beauty, causing them to dress in an ostentatious manner to impress others. On the other hand, a little perfume and lipstick may enhance a woman’s outward beauty and femininity without causing her to become a Jezebel. A little paint helps an old barn!

If verses such as 2 Kings 9:30 (Jezebel painting her face or eyelids), or Ezekiel 23:40 and Jeremiah 4:30 (wayward Jerusalem’s unfaithfulness being compared to an unfaithful woman who painted her face) condemn the actual wearing of make-up then they also condemn combing or fixing the hair for this is what Jezebel did along with wearing makeup. They also condemn taking a bath for this is what the woman did in Ezekiel’s account. Obviously true doctrines or Biblical standards cannot be built on incidental statements such as these. Let us reason together. Luke tells us that there was a prostitute who had long hair (Luke 7:37-47). Does this mean that all women who wear long hair are prostitutes? Absolutely not. If an unfaithful wife is mentioned as wearing jewelry (Hosea 2:13) does that mean women who wear jewelry today are unfaithful to their

husbands? Of course not. On the same basis, the fact that there are three scattered references to women wearing makeup does not make it a sin for women to wear makeup. *These verses reveal that it was the motive, the attitude, and the intention of the heart that made the wearing of makeup wrong.* God is not against makeup or decoration. The women of Bible times are seen to use perfume, jewelry, and such things as make-up without God chiding them for such use. Out of 31,101 verses in the Bible, not one gives a command against make-up. One must wonder where men ever got the idea that God wanted people to look drab and like a dungeon. Joseph had a coat of many colors. Then too, nature is not this way. Suppose God had not included color in nature? Imagine all flowers and grass without color. The New Jerusalem is described as having all sorts of dazzling colors, stones, and jewels. God is not against color and decoration. He is against extremism and extravagance that seeks to glorify the flesh and promote the pride of life. A sensible use of color, jewelry, perfume, and make-up is not contrary to the principles of the Christian faith.

### **3. The Bible teaches that dress should reflect a distinction among the sexes.**

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.”

During Bible times there was little difference between the wearing of garments; however, there was a distinction in the overall appearance in order to maintain the necessary distinction among the sexes. Men and women wore the same kind of clothing (2 Kings 2:8-13; John 19:24), but it differed in detail. They both would wear an inner garment, a girdle, and an outer garment, but the dress of the woman was more elaborate and ornamented. However, the women wore longer tunics and larger mantles than the men. Also the women would often wear a veil covering their face.

Our present generation has jettisoned most cultural standards which have reflected traditional and important distinctions among the sexes and family values. When boundaries and definitions begin to change

the conservative Christian does not seek to change and distort God's order for the sexes. He steers away from making changes, which would no longer reflect Biblical manhood and womanhood, and seeks to maintain traditional and Biblical values and standards, which are rooted in the doctrine of Bible separation and God's unchanging ethical and moral standards.

This verse reveals another timeless principle and ethical value that society and all Christians should adopt. There should be a certain distinction in dress between the sexes. Many people write this verse off because it's found in the Old Testament and they suggest that the church today is no longer living under the jurisdiction of the Mosaic Law. Instead, the church is living under the grace dispensation, which has abolished the observance of the Mosaic Law (Romans 6:14). It's assumed that all of the laws represented in the Mosaic code of the Old Testament were merely *ritual* laws that are no longer applicable to our own contemporary society and situation. In short, many conclude that the Mosaic code does not apply to our day and time. This type of conclusion breeds confusion and is a gross misunderstanding of what it means to live under grace. Although believers have been released from the Mosaic Law regulations as an outworking of many minuscule rules, which taught typical lessons about Christ and separation, they are still obligated to follow the unchanging moral and ethical laws of God.

Living under grace does not mean that we scrap God's moral and timeless ethical principles mentioned in the Old Testament. It's true that the restriction of many tedious rules that pertained to God's dispensational purpose for Israel under Law is set in contrast to freedom from these strict minuscule rules, which have no further purpose or typical lessons behind them under grace (Matt. 23:23; Exodus 30:19-21; Lev. 5:2; 11:29-32; Numb. 6:18). But it's equally true that nine out of the Ten Commandments are restated in the New Testament teachings of grace in the present dispensation, at least in principle form (1 John 3:11-15; 5:21; James 5:12; Eph 4:28-29; 5:3; 6:1-3; Col 3:5-10; 1 Thess. 4:3-7; Rom. 13:8-10), and these are all valid for believers to follow in the present dispensation, with the exception of the Sabbath observance (Col. 2:16). This is because nine of the Ten Commandments pertain to the *moral law of God* and are rooted in God's essential holy and righteous character, which

must be observed by everyone, in every generation or dispensation, and under all conditions. There are ceremonial laws that were only intended to be temporary and for Israel whereas there were moral laws that were given that are unchanging and obligatory upon all people in all places and at times.

To claim that God's holiness code and all His moral and ethical laws are done away with under grace is a fallacy of the worst sort. If this were the case we would have to conclude that it is morally okay to commit adultery (Lev. 18:20), commit bestiality (Lev. 18:23), put our children to death (Lev. 18:21), or commit incest with family members (Lev. 18:6-18). This is an absurdity. For instance, there are many things mentioned in Leviticus that are obligatory for today such as not committing adultery (Lev. 18:20) or idolatry (19:4) and the need to love others (Lev. 19:18). Jesus even quoted from Leviticus 19:18 in the New Testament (Matt. 19:19, 22:39) to stress loving others. Of course, this does not mean Christians live under the Law as a means of salvation or sanctification. We do live under grace (Rom. 6:14) but the moral Law of God, which predates the Mosaic Law, always remains in place no matter what society says or does. Living under grace also means that we can live according to the inward teaching and transforming power of grace instead of the outward teaching ministry of the Law (John 1:16-17; Rom. 6:14; 7:4; Gal. 5:22-23; Phil. 2:13; 2 Cor. 3:3).

In addition, we must remember that everything written in the Old Testament is written for our learning and spiritual profit (Romans 15:4). To blindly overlook God's unchanging moral and ethical laws without consideration of their application to our contemporary culture and lives today is an injustice to the Word of God.

Roy B. Zuck has this to say about culture and the Bible:

“When the Bible clearly gives a command and nowhere else nullifies that command, it must be accepted as the revealed will of God and a mandate to mold our personal and group behavior (our culture) in the form of this instruction.”

We must remember that we can glean many important details for living from the examples and principles that have been previously stated in the Old Testament (1 Cor. 10:11). In other words, we need

to approach the Old Testament with reverence and respect and see what God has ordained for our lives today even though the typical and ritual Mosaic laws have no further application to our lives. Although we don't follow the intricate laws established under the law we do follow the *principles* and *practical lessons* being taught by them.

So when do we know whether or not to go by an Old Testament regulation? What is our general interpretive guide and rule to follow so that we can rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15)? Our rule to follow is this. When an Old Testament principle is repeated in the New Testament then that rule or principle is for us today. This means we are to follow it. Now you won't ever find a New Testament verse that says observe the Sabbath day. That is the reason we don't observe Sabbath laws. You won't find any New Testament verse that says we are to kill an animal and have a blood sacrifice. That's the reason we don't do it. But anything commanded in the Old Testament and repeated in the New Testament is for us today.

So is there a parallel statement in the New Testament concerning cross-dressing and unisex living as mentioned in Deuteronomy 22:5? The answer is yes. In 1 Corinthians Paul draws a clear distinction between the sexes in appearance.

First, local custom dictated a distinction in cross-dressing when praying (1 Cor. 11:4-13). Second, this custom was based on the enduring principle of sexual distinction among the sexes in relationship to hair length. First Corinthians 11:14-15 says:

“Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.”

God says there should be a difference between the man and the woman in the physical appearance of hair lengths. The natural God-given instincts built into a man and woman should reveal to them that long hair on a man is a disgrace to manhood and short hair on a woman is a disgrace to womanhood. Therefore, a man should not seek to have a hair length that resembles a woman and a woman should not possess a hair length that resembles a man. When looking

behind a person their gender should be discernable. The cut or style of a man's hair should not resemble a woman and the cut or style of a woman's hair should not resemble a man. It's not a sin for a woman to cut her as some have maintained. However, it is wrong for a woman to cut her hair like a man and take on the appearance of a man. The same is true for the man.

People have asked me over the years, "Pastor, should I cut my hair a little shorter as a man or keep it a little longer as a woman? Should I stop wearing necklaces and earrings as a man since men have not traditionally worn them and they were a sign of femininity?"

The answer to these questions is simple and I usually answer in this way.

1. Counteract culture when necessary.

Don't follow the culture when it tries to openly and defiantly blur the distinction among the sexes. As Christians we must counteract the culture that seeks to unite the sexes (Romans 12:2). As I have already stated, when someone looks at you from the back, they should be able to tell what you are! When they look at you from the front there should be no doubt that you have the overall distinguishing marks of the sexes.

2. Don't walk the line.

Dress and look like a man or woman in the best possible light. Don't remove the old landmarks (Prov. 23:10) and the long established cultural differences between the sexes. Stay within the boundaries and don't walk so close to the edge. You might fall off!

Now this is the same principle and idea of Deuteronomy 22:5 which says, "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment..." We have the same principle of Deuteronomy 22:5 repeated right here in the New Testament concerning unisex looks and living.

Let me share something with you that is very interesting. I have in my library a book called *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*. It is one

of the most beneficial books I have ever owned. It is simply a book of parallel references, just like the center reference column you have in your Bible, but it is greatly expanded. This book was printed over one hundred years ago, back when they weren't having many of the problems we are having today with cross-dressing. The *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* at Deuteronomy 22:5 has a parallel reference of 1 Corinthians 11:3-14. That's interesting to me. You know what this proves? It proves that men who have studied the Bible over one-hundred years ago have seen that 1 Corinthians 11 contains the same principle that is stated in Deuteronomy 22:5. The point is this. God has moral and ethical laws that do not change from one dispensation to the next.

I was also interested in what I found in the Keil and Deilech commentary regarding this matter. That commentary was first printed more than a hundred years ago. Charles Spurgeon refers to Keil and Deilech and many other older commentators. Here is what this authority on the Old Testament says concerning Deuteronomy 22:5:

“As the property of a neighbour was to be sacred in the estimation of an Israelite, so also the divine distinction of the sexes, which was kept sacred in civil life by the clothing peculiar to each sex, was to be not less but even more sacredly observed.” ... “The immediate design of this prohibition was not to prevent licentiousness, or to oppose idolatrous practices but to maintain the sanctity of that distinction of the sexes which was established by the creation of man and woman, and in relation to which Israel was not to sin. Every violation or wiping out of this distinction-such even, for example, as the emancipation of a woman-was unnatural, and therefore an abomination in the sight of God.”

My point is this. Very scholarly men throughout the years have associated Deuteronomy 22:5 with a *continuing ethic* for today. The principle behind this text is restated in the New Testament and is an important ethical consideration for the sexes today. I don't hesitate to use Deuteronomy 22:5 to prove that there must be a distinction in dress among the sexes any more than I would hesitate to use Psalm 23 at a funeral. This is because both these truths are repeated in the New Testament and become authoritative for us today. Anybody who reads the Bible can see that all the way through, in every age and

every testament, God has said that He wants men and women to look different. Consequently, we ought not to wear clothing that applies to the opposite sex. This principle still holds true today in regards to our customary wear even when certain cultural changes take place in relationship to customary wear or dress. There must be a clear distinction of the sexes instead of blurring the distinctions (unisex philosophy).

The principle of the distinction among the sexes can be simply stated like this: Women should look, dress, and act like women, whereas men should look, dress, and act like men. The grace dispensation does not overrule the distinction among the sexes. If it did then the church should not judge the sins of homosexuality and transvestism. *God's moral and timeless ethical codes remain in tact throughout all the changing dispensations.* Although there might be differences of opinion in regards to the exact nature and extent of some of these distinctions between clothing, due to cultural changes, the timeless principle still stands in tact. It cannot be erased. Distinction must abound among the sexes in every culture and at all times.

Deuteronomy 22:5 was obviously written to maintain the sanctity of the distinction of the sexes, which was established by the creation of man and woman. Adopting clothing of the opposite sex was forbidden because it obscured the distinction of the sexes and thus violated an essential part of the created order of life.

Genesis 1:27

“So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

God created mankind, as male and female, possessing distinctive natures and functions. Specifically, in the divinely established order of authority, man is the head of the woman as they live together (1 Cor. 11:3). The woman is to be submissive to the man. *The proper distinction in dress would support this creation truth and order for the sexes.* The whole creation of mankind as male and female, with different roles and gender, would necessitate a distinction among the sexes.



Deuteronomy 22:5 mentions cross-dressing as an “abomination unto the LORD.” The same Hebrew word translated “abomination” is used to describe God’s view of homosexuality (Lev. 18:22; 20:13). This reveals God’s sore displeasure of the practice. There is some evidence that exists which suggests that transvestism may have been connected with the worship of pagan deities and that this particular sin provides the backdrop for the statute about cross-dressing. So transvestism (a person who assumes the dress and mannerisms of the opposite sex) may be in the background and understanding of this statement. This is what becomes an “abomination” to God. It is something utterly detestable in His holy sight.

Just for the record, this is something much more serious than a woman wearing pants, as some preachers have charged. Cross-dressing was forbidden by God in ancient Israel because of the detestable practice of transvestism. In the ancient Middle East, dressing in the clothing of the opposite sex was a magical practice intended to bring harm to people. For example, a transvestite male would predict that the soldiers of another army would be as weak as females. So one primary application of this text for today would be to condemn transvestite practices, sex changes, and other gender perversions. All of these practices fall under this category. A secondary application would be to keep a valid distinction among the sexes so that the roles of gender are never confused.

George Zeller states:

“Men should dress like men; women should dress like women; boys should dress like boys; girls should dress like girls. If God has made you a boy (male), then act like one, look like one and BE ONE! If God has made you a girl (female), then act like one, look like one and BE ONE!”

The whole point is this. Since this law was related to the divine order of creation, prior to the Mosaic Law, and since God detests anyone who mixes sexual distinction by dress or ornamentation, then believers living today should also heed this command. This statute prohibited a man from wearing any item of feminine clothing or ornamentation, or a woman from wearing any item of masculine clothing or ornamentation. As we have said, this instance specifically outlawed transvestism. But behind this statute is an important binding

principle that must be followed today in order to distinguish the sexes. God still does demand the marks of sexual distinction in the midst of a society that is becoming increasingly unisex.

For this reason, Deuteronomy 22:5 has caused divisions and confusion among sincere Christian brethren that have adopted a more rigid interpretation for sexual distinction. For instance, this verse has become the tried-and-true text for heated sermons against women wearing slacks. Some have used this verse to maintain that women should never wear any kind of slacks since a man wears slacks. However, one must remember that during this period of history people wore similar clothing, which consisted of robes (Deut. 22:30; 1 Samuel 24:4-5; Ruth 3:9; Zech. 8:23). It is very evident that both sexes wore robe type garments. So if a man wants to be dogmatic about women wearing slacks he should try wearing a robe for a while for this would make the situation must closer to the way it was during Bible times. He would at least be consistent with the context and era when this was written.

The key to this command is distinction. Throughout the changing cultures there must always be a distinction. So whatever a lady wears, whether it is slacks or a pants suit, she should always strive to maintain a distinction. *She should try to feminize her dress in some way to appear as a woman who wants to maintain a distinction.* A woman should express femininity (womanhood) or portray femininity in the best possibility light. There can be distinctions between a woman's pair of slacks and a man's pair of slacks. A woman can maintain this distinction if she chooses to. Furthermore, there can be added feminine articles and adornments that help portray and express her femininity.

A man should also portray masculinity (manhood) in the best possible light. For instance, when I want to buy a pair of slacks at a department store I don't go to the woman's section to buy them. As women and men purchase clothing they should do so with some kind of emphasis on distinction. There are many ways a woman can remain feminine in the midst of a cultural unisex revolution. She should always maintain the best testimony of distinction possible as she lives and portrays herself before the world and her husband. And ladies remember one thing. Men still love femininity and the feminine

look. Let your man read Song of Solomon chapter 4 to you and see if you can get the drift! I'm not advocating dressing sleazily but dressing feminine and where there is more distinction in the clothing and outward adornment there will be more femininity portrayed. This is a good policy to follow. Ladies, your desire should be to please the Lord in your feminine dress ("to please God" - 1 Thess. 4:1) and at the same time please your man ("how she may please her husband" - 1 Cor. 7:34) by remaining feminine in appearance to him.

When your husband comes home from work he would much rather see a wife who looks like a woman than a wife who is manlike in appearance. He wants to embrace a woman who looks and smells like a woman, a woman who has the feminine qualities and attractiveness of the opposite sex, and a woman who appreciates and understands the importance of her feminine expression and beauty (Prov. 31:22). A wife must not look plain in order to be godly and dress plain in order to hide or subdue her femininity. There is no Scriptural warrant for such teaching and practice. If the motive of a woman's heart is right her efforts to look nice are not wrong.

Billy Sunday once said:

"Some persons think they have to look like a hedgehog to be pious."

In Deuteronomy 22:5 the word "pertaineth unto" in the original Hebrew language (Heb. - *keli*) is used elsewhere, not only of clothes, but also of the decorations and jewels used by the sexes (Exodus 11:2; 35:22). This suggests that the word indicates much more than just dress or clothing. *The entire appearance is indicated.* We must also remember that during the days of Moses the garments (robes) worn by men and women were very similar in appearance. They only differed in color. The women had multi-colored robes and the men had single-colored robes. *The major difference between male and female robes was their decoration or ornamentation - not their cut.*

This passage is not dealing with the cut of a garment but more specifically the ornamental features that were designed for the garments. Since both robes were cut the same way other distinguishing marks and added feminine characteristics, other than the minor color differences in robes, made a woman to stand out and be different than a man. A woman would wear other decor to make

her feminine and unlike a man. I think this is the true interpretation and understanding of Deuteronomy 22:5. More than just the woman's dress is in view. Her general or overall appearance is to be different than a man.

This command was then designed to keep a woman from appearing as a man, or a man from appearing as a woman, even when similar clothing was worn between the two sexes. The clothing that is designed for women should be worn by women and the clothing that is designed for men should be worn by men even when there are minor differences. The same should be true about other outward ornamentation. The intent of this law was to maintain the distinction between the sexes. The application for today is obvious. Men should not wear lipstick, makeup, and girlish things that women normally wear or any unisex clothing that would cloud the distinction between men and women. The New Testament recognizes such a distinction (I Cor 11:3) and maintains that long hair on women was a sign of that distinction (I Cor 11:6–14). Today men have attempted to wear their hair long and also wear jewelry and earrings like women have traditionally and culturally worn. In doing so, they begin to blur the cultural distinctions among the sexes.

The principle taught by this passage is that the proper distinction between men and women in all cultures should be maintained. The passage does not teach against women wearing slacks *per se* (or hats, shoes, gloves, etc. since all are worn by both sexes), but against men or women wearing any item specifically ornamented for the opposite sex (a man wearing female slacks, lipstick, necklaces, makeup, jewelry, etc). We must remember that when Moses gave this command no one wore pants. No one! They both wore robes. So trying to push a “no pants” philosophy on Christian women today seems to go beyond the Biblical and logical explanation of this passage.

A woman who chooses to wear feminine-looking pants and who strives to appear like a woman in her overall appearance should not be judged by any would-be preacher who has an axe to grind. The final criteria for women is that in overall appearance they look like females, that they are modest (I Tim 2:9–10), and that their outward appearance is not overly stressed at the expense of their inner

character or beauty (1 Pet 3:3). The same criteria can be stressed for the men as well. They are to look like men, remain modest, and maintain a manly distinction and appearance at all times without forgetting about their inner spiritual life before God (Psalm 42:1).

The whole emphasis is this. There is to be a noted difference among the sexes in the way they dress. The Christian should not allow the changing culture to blur obvious and normal sexual distinctions. Men wearing their hair long like women and wearing girlish necklaces and earrings which women have traditionally worn, as a sign of femininity (1 Peter 3:3), and women cutting their hair like men, is an obvious intrusion upon God's design to maintain sexual distinction. The line of demarcation is being lost today as culture keeps chipping away at sexual distinction and tries to find common ground. The Christian should chart a clear course and stay away from blurring distinctions among the sexes in the matter of dress and appearance. Boundaries must be marked and maintained. When in doubt, don't! Failure to do so will shame God's design for femininity and masculinity.

Here is the point. Each gender must keep sexual distinction. The overall appearance should be different. The decor and overall appearance of a woman is to be different than a man. During my generation the men have started to wear earrings, necklaces, and bracelets like a women and I think the next thing will probably be lipstick, nail polish, and pink bows in their hair. Where does it stop? In my early days, when men started wearing necklaces and bracelets, we called these men "femmy" which is short for being feminine. Some things are just femmy!

As the culture changes, we must ask ourselves these important questions. If I follow a new cultural trend, will it still maintain a distinction among the sexes? Will I appear more feminine than manly, or will I appear manlier instead of feminine? Is the exact item that I'm purchasing worn by the opposite sex? In other words, as a man, I should not wear anything that a woman would normally or traditionally wear. As a woman, I should not wear anything that a man would normally or traditionally wear.

Here are some more questions to consider. Does the item make *enough distinction* even if there are certain similarities in

appearance? How much distinction is maintained? For instance, there should be some kind of distinction in the outward appearance of clothing when they are worn. There must be some kind of distinction among the overall appearance between men and women. Don't become a copycat. Trying to maintain a general distinction will help us answer the third set of questions. Is the item you want to wear specifically geared for the masculine or feminine gender? Does it accentuate a woman's femininity or does it de-emphasize a man's masculinity?

Men, don't look feminine within the culture. Ladies, don't look manly. As ladies, you should look feminine by the way you dress and decorate yourself. By the way, men still do love to see a woman in a dress. Why? It's because men in our culture don't wear dresses. This means that a woman is certainly portraying her femininity when wearing dresses. However, this certainly does not mean she cannot display femininity, when dressing in other ways, and as she maintains an overall feminine appearance. Men love femininity – not feminism! In light of the day in which we live the believer should present the least questionable testimony before the world as we represent a distinction among the sexes.

The believer should be willing to part from the unisex practices and philosophy within our present-day corrupt culture. Both the man and woman should have a heart that is determined to practice what is right and holy in God's sight (1 Pet. 1:15-16) and learn what is "that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2) for their lives. In light of the day in which we live believers should present ***the least questionable testimony*** before the world and represent Christianity as a non-rebellious movement of people that are different than the world and its standards, which represent rebellion against God (1 Sam. 15:23).

I think all the questions that Christians argue about concerning dress can be settled by plain old common sense. *The principle is to let the appearance be different enough that folks won't have any doubt.* That's the way to answer it all! You don't have to get the pastor's opinion on a certain article of clothing. Just draw the line and determine to wear something and look like something so that no one will ever have a doubt concerning sexual distinction. Be sure it's

going to look like a man's clothing and be manly in appearance. Be sure it's going to look like a women's clothing and be feminine in appearance. Keep a noticeable distinction. Do not wear the exact clothing and articles that the opposite sex wears. *Similar looking clothing should be feminized in some way.* This can be done by maintaining a noticeable distinction in the articles of clothing themselves. It can also be done by accentuating the feminine appearance through outward adornment (Deut. 22:5). In other words, a woman can also appear to be different by adding feminine qualities and characteristics (womanly attractiveness) to her apparel and over all appearance. In any event, if you are in doubt about wearing something, then don't wear it, and you will be safe (Rom. 14:23). Just make sure that whatever you wear identifies you as a male or female. Keep the distinction clear. Let us be able to say to our future generation of children, "This is a boy and this is a girl."

#### **4. The Bible teaches that dress should never become worldly.**

Is a woman worldly just because she wears make-up? Is a person worldly because he wears a new style of clothing or purchases a new car? These are the questions we want to answer in this point. The Bible teaches that nothing we purchase, wear, or do should cause us to develop worldliness in our hearts and lives. Our dress, speech, activities, hobbies, and worship should never cause the believer to conform to the pattern of the world system.

Romans 12:1-2 says:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed (molded) to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Yes, we are not to be conformed to the world or as the Bible states elsewhere "not fashioning" (1 Pet. 1:14) ourselves to the world. But what is worldliness? We might also ask this question in light of our current study. What constitutes worldly dress? Some have the idea or mindset that worldly dress is wearing something that is bright in color, such as a red coat. It is assumed that the more subdued colors, such

as black and white, are more conservative and not worldly. Therefore, when a person wears some brighter color they are conforming themselves to the world. Others suggest that worldliness in dress is reflected when a person follows a new fad in clothing or apparel. In other words, a person becomes worldly when they wear something that is popular within the current culture. It is then concluded that when a person wears popular or trendy clothing that they are fashioning themselves into the world's mold. But is it really wrong for a Christian to dress in style? Is a Christian necessarily worldly when he wears something that is being promoted in society?

Let's determine what the world is and what the world is not. The world is an organized cultural system that is made up of a set of attitudes, ideas, thoughts, works, values, people, activities, music, money, trends, styles, influences, places, philosophies and purposes that are opposed to God and which takes us away from loving God supremely and following God's will completely.

1 John 2:15-17 verifies how the world steals away our heart's love and devotion from God when saying: "Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

John seems to be saying that we should not make an idol out of anything in the world. When we do it becomes worldly to our own personal lives. Every detailed thing within the cultural setting ("the things in the world" – 1 John 2:15), which causes a believer to lust and develop pride, will keep them from loving God as they should and doing God's will. As a result, when we lust after things and develop pride in our hearts, it's then that worldliness has set into our lives. *Self-centered living ("lust of the flesh") and self-glorification ("pride of life") are the twin sins of worldly living. In other words, when a person engages in these sins they have allowed worldliness to enter their hearts and lives.* Worldliness is anything within a given cultural setting (clothing, politics, music, hobbies) that causes lust (self-centered living) and pride (self-glorification) to swell up in our hearts, which in return keeps us from loving God, as we ought to love Him. It is



anything within the present culture that keeps us from doing the will of God, as we ought to do it. Loving the Father supremely and doing the Father's will are the two tests we need to take in order to determine what has become worldly in our own hearts and lives.

At this point something else needs to be said. We must not come to the conclusion that every new cultural dress, style, haircut, lawnmower, and new car is worldly simply because it is new. Just because we decide to buy a new style of car or clothing does not make us worldly unless we are doing it for self-centered fleshly reasons ("the lust of the flesh"). It's equally true that wearing a new style of clothing does not make us worldly *unless we are doing it for prideful reasons* ("the pride of life"). Christians develop pride in their hearts when they possess the underlying motive to promote themselves or lift themselves up by the way that they dress, act, and look (Matt. 6:5 – "that they may be seen of men"). They develop pride when they have the mindset that they can become someone of importance if they mimic others and act like them. Christians can dress a certain way in order to try and draw attention to themselves for various reasons.

Of course, all of this is done in the name of pride. We must beware that we do not attempt to knowingly draw attention to ourselves by our looks and dress. This is nothing more than the sin of pride, which is practiced today in our own cultural environment. All of us can become guilty of this sin if we do not guard our hearts. We can become a *slave to fashion and current trends* to the point that we must have what everyone else has in order to be accepted. This becomes a matter of pride in our heart and peer pressure can drive us to the place of pride.

Let's consider the new red coat that you are thinking about buying and compare it to 1 John 2:16 which talks about the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

- When you see the red coat do you lose control and begin to covet it ("lust of the eyes")?
- Are you infatuated with the coat to the point that you are lusting for it ("lust of the flesh")?

- Do you want to buy this red coat to keep up with the family down the street or fit into the accepted norm of society (“pride of life”)?
- Do you want to impress others with this new coat (“pride of life”)?
- Do you want others to notice you or look at you (“pride of life”)?
- Does what you see in the culture create an overwhelming desire in your heart to possess it so that you might feel fulfilled in life by the physical or material things of society (“lust of the eyes”)?
- Is it because you want to excel, show off, be like others, fit in with the crowd, or remain one step above everyone else (“pride of life”)?

So let’s reiterate. Something like dress becomes worldly to our personal lives when we want to do it for fleshly reasons (self-centeredness) or when we possess a prideful spirit when dressing in a certain manner (self-glorification). Of course, some of the fleshly reasons to conform to the world’s culture might stem from a person’s desire to rebel against the timeless standards that God has established in the Bible (Proverbs 6:16-19, 23:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Exodus 20:1-16) or the God ordained patterns that demand a distinction between the sexes (Deut. 22:5; 1 Cor. 11:14-15).

Another fleshly reason for cultural conformity is so believers can blend into the present day society out of fear that others will notice that they are a Christian (John 19:38; 12:42-43). Some believers conform to every new cultural standard or fad that comes down the pike out of sheer peer pressure and for the simple reason that they don’t want others to look down upon them for being Christians. We must remember how “evil companionships corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33) and that there will be times when we must stand alone like Daniel (Daniel 1:8). We must purpose in our hearts not defile ourselves by worldly (lustful or prideful) conformity to our present day culture.

Then too, God's people can become self-centered or fleshly in their pursuits within life, when they try to copy every new cultural standard, which stems from a greedy or covetous desire that is lurking within their hearts (Luke 12:15 – "beware of covetousness"). Another fleshly desire that God's children can possess might also include the overwhelming drive to experience social acceptance among the world of unsaved people. This drive and determination becomes so strong that God's own people love to please others and have man's praise more than Christ's praise (Rom. 2:29; John 8:29).

Pride may also enter into the picture when wearing certain apparel. When a person wants to keep up with the Joneses in order to be noticed and show off their feathers, or if they dress in a certain manner to promote themselves in society, then pride becomes a factor. *Beware of being trendy just to be trendy.* This is good advice. Some other good advice we have already mentioned is this. Don't be the first to try the new or the last to retire the old. This will keep our hearts from developing a worldly slant on living. It will also help those who tend to covet new things and who want to express themselves in a prideful manner.

So is it really wrong when Christians want to be like everybody else in order to remain socially and culturally accepted by the majority of people? The answer to this question is obvious. Yes! The all-consuming desire to be like everyone else (the crowd) is something that can rule Christian hearts and lives and become a **self-centered** fleshly thing and a form of **pride** as Christians try to promote and conform themselves to everything and everyone else in society. Keeping up with the culture can become like a *powerful drug* that enslaves people. Paul said that nothing should enslave us within the culture.

1 Corinthians 6:12 says:

"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power (authority) of any."

It's no secret that many Christian lives are obsessed with being like everyone else. They want to hang with the crowd and adopt their fleshly music, fads, and funky ways. As a result of this mad craze for

cultural conformity we have an earth-centered way of living being practiced by many present day Christians (Phil. 3:19; Col. 3:1-10) and a wisdom that reflects the world (James 3:15). Christians are ready to participate in any offbeat, odd, or quirky appearance and style of clothing or music. And all of this is done in the name of cultural acceptance but it really is practiced for cultural conformity, which is what the Bible condemns (Romans 12:2). *It's amazing how some new practice or piece of clothing can attract the self-centered, covetous, and prideful spirit in Christians and begin to rule their hearts.* As a result, we see how many believers out of sheer lust and pride desire the acceptance of others and become obsessed with having the same things as others, looking like others, and doing the same things that everyone else is practicing in society. Becoming like everyone else (world conformity) becomes an addictive force and pattern in the lives of many Christians. *They simply want to copy the system in order to keep up with others (lust of the flesh) and lift themselves up like others (pride of life).*

On the other hand, a person may wear some culturally up-to-date clothing and not possess a worldly spirit of covetousness, lust, and pride. He or she may simply like the piece of clothing. Is it wrong to like something? *There is a difference between liking something and lusting after something.* Furthermore, there is a difference between enjoying a piece of clothing because it's *pretty* and being motivated to wear something out of *pride*. I may enjoy eating a chocolate candy bar without lusting after the candy bar. Who is to say that a woman wearing a red coat has lustful reasons for wearing the coat or that her heart is filled with pride? Who is to say that when a person chooses to wear a pair of blue jeans that they have worldliness in their heart? Certainly we cannot judge the heart (1 Cor. 4:4-5).

I have been told by well-meaning Christians that wearing denim is a worldly sin. Somehow the blue threads of denim are seen to be a compromise with the world. However, I have searched the Bible in vain to find any verses or Bible principles that specifically condemn the wearing of denim. When we begin to assume that worldliness is rooted in certain colors, styles, and types of cloth we become confused concerning the Biblical teaching on worldliness.

Wearing a new style of clothing or a certain type of apparel does not necessarily generate worldliness in our lives. Worldliness raises its ugly head in our lives when we wear something that is immodest, when we dress in a manner that fails to make a clear distinction among the sexes, when we dress in excess in order to flaunt our lives before others, or when we wear apparel for self-centered fleshly reasons (“the lust of the flesh”) and for prideful reasons (“pride of life”). Worldliness in dress can be manifested when we dress without respecting God’s timeless principles for apparel and when we allow our hearts to be lured away by lust or pride. *Worldliness in dress may not be a style related problem but a heart related problem.*

We might add something else as this point. To insist on wearing archaic and out-of-date clothing for the sake of being “better than others” or “holier than thou” can create a sense of pride in those who wear them. In other words, a person who dresses in plain clothing from the past decade also has the potential of becoming guilty of wearing clothing for prideful reasons (“the pride of life” – 1 John 2:16). In other words, a person can dress up or dress down and express a prideful and worldly attitude in their heart. The key to dress is *balance*. Don’t go overboard and don’t go back two centuries! Maintain a balance and keep your heart right.

We must also remember that under grace (Rom. 6:14) there is freedom to choose those things that are *amoral* in design such as clothing, meats, and jewelry so long as they do not blur sexual distinction, create immodesty, and the sins of self and pride. We must never forget that God has given the basic things of life for man to enjoy (1 Tim. 4:4-5). To teach that man cannot enjoy the most basic things of life such as certain foods, clothing, and marriage are clearly denounced in the New Testament (1 Tim. 4:1-3; Col. 2:20-23 – “taste not”, “touch not”, “handle not”). We can enjoy the world in which we live without coveting the things in the world (1 Tim. 6:17), loving them (1 John 2:15), and lusting after them (1 John 2:16). God has given to us many things to enjoy. God told Adam that he could eat of “every tree of the garden” except one (Gen. 2:16).

We don't need to become ascetic in our practice and fear enjoying the good things in the world and enjoying life in general (Col. 2:20-23). Today there are no miniscule restrictions or laws given for

Christian living (Col. 3:16) that sort out the differences between the colors, fibers, and types of clothing a person must wear (Deut. 22:11-12). This is because the purpose of the Mosaic Law with its typical teachings and lessons has passed away. The types give way to the real thing in New Testament living. The point is this. Clothing becomes worldly when a person breaks God's instructions for modesty (1 Tim. 2:9), sexual distinction (Deut. 22:5), excess (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3-4), and when they wear clothing for lustful, selfish, and prideful reasons (1 John 2:15-16).

*We must remember that changing with the culture is not necessarily the same as conforming to the culture. It is safe to assume that the Christian can change with the culture so long as the culture does not change the Christian.* Think about it. If the culture does not deter the believer from being obedient to clearly stated commands and principles in the Word of God, then the culture can be safely followed. If the Christian is not following the culture for any fleshly and prideful reasons he or she can change without allowing the culture to become worldly to his own heart and life. For example, a Christian might buy a new car model or a new style of clothing without allowing that car or piece of clothing to become worldly to his heart and life. There are times you can safely change with the culture without conforming to it. We often must *counteract* the culture but there are other times when we can *change* with the culture without offending God and violating any Biblical principles.

## **5. The Bible teaches that dress should remain respectful.**

Zephaniah 1:8

“And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD'S sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel.”

The understanding of “strange apparel” or “foreign apparel” means that the people were clad in clothes that the pagan surrounding nations would wear. They abandoned the traditional normal clothing worn by Jews for alien clothes that were from other nations and this became a sign of their spiritual departure and rebellion toward God. For a Jew to depart from traditional clothing and wear the apparel of foreign nations was treason to the Jewish way of life. It was a sign

that they had abandoned faithfulness to God and obedience to His law. Therefore, God makes a negative remark about their strange or foreign apparel, since He knew what was in the hearts of the people who were wearing it. Merrill F. Unger states that the expression foreign apparel “is a reference to the courtiers who dressed in expensive attire imported from abroad” and he goes on to say that the people were “imitating the luxury of those nations as well as their idolatries, and violating the divine command to be separate from pagan peoples.”

Let’s bring this up-to-date in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Certainly when we begin to dress immodestly, in a manner that draws attention to ourselves, without any distinction among the sexes, and in a worldly (lustful and prideful) way, we could conclude that our apparel becomes “strange apparel” (pagan apparel) before God. However, this Bible verse specifically reveals that our dress can become “strange apparel” before God when the manner in which we dress reflects a *heart attitude of rebellion and disrespect toward God instead of reverence toward Him*.

Several things can be noted by this verse. First, God does look at the way we dress. Sometimes we seem to bypass this rather obvious point. God looks at the way we dress and this can be proven in that God calls certain clothing “strange apparel.” God would not reveal that His people were dressing in a “strange” manner if He was not drawing His attention to the way that they were dressing. In spite of what the *freethinkers* of modern evangelicalism are teaching today God is still interested in our dress.

In this passage we are going to see that the people were dressing disrespectfully in their living and time of worship because they mimicked the heathen dress (Zephaniah 1:5). This became a sign of their rebellious heart. So God was concerned with the way His people were dressing. In addition, we have already seen that God gives instruction concerning modest dress (2 Tim. 1:9), dressing without excess (1 Pet. 3:3-4), dressing to maintain a distinction among the sexes (Duet. 22:5), and dressing in a non-worldly fashion (1 John 2:16; 1 Pet. 1:14). God is concerned with the way we dress. We might also add that God is concerned that we dress in a way which does not openly and knowingly offend other believers.

Romans 14:20-21 states this principle:

“For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed *are* pure; but *it is* evil for that man who eateth with offence. *It is* good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor *any thing* (this includes dress) whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.”

This becomes especially important in our church fellowships. It is an applicable point to our church assemblies. I would say that this is often forgotten in a day when liberty is promoted at the expense of the brethren and their conscience regarding certain types of dress (1 Cor. 10:28-31). We should always express love to others (Gal. 5:13) in the way we dress within our stated church gatherings and not offend fellow believers.

Second, we learn from this verse in Zephaniah 1:8 that a person’s rebellious attitude toward God can be revealed by the way that they dress. In this particular verse God was displeased that the people were wearing the dress of the foreign Gentiles. This was an indication and outward sign to God of their rebellion toward His holy ways. Their rebellion was clearly revealed by the prophet’s description in the previous verses (Zephaniah 1:4-6). To dress in a different fashion than the Hebrew people normally dressed would be an indication and outward sign to God that they had allowed their hearts to be captured and overtaken by the heathen lifestyles and ways of the Gentiles. In short, their manner of dress demonstrated that the people lacked reverence for God and His truth both in their living and worship.

You will notice that the people digressed to such a point that they were wearing this type of apparel while they practiced a compromising worship “that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham” (vs. 5). Syncretism worship was practiced by the people and their foreign dress indicated that their hearts were in rebellion against the true God of Heaven. Their manner of dress indicated that they lacked reverence and respect toward God’s holiness, authority, and right to rule their lives.

When the people were determined to adopt a style of dress that was patterned after the heathen people of the land, and when they were committed to wearing this type of apparel, God became angered with them. God’s children were rebellious toward Him and their dress



displayed this message to God. They had spiritually digressed in their lives to such a point that they were dressing in a rebellious fashion, even during their times of worship. So the people had absorbed in their hearts the foreign or worldly values and practices of the heathen nations surrounding them. This was evident in their manner of dress, which demonstrated their disrespect for God and showed their lack of reverence toward Him. This is because their dress became an outward sign of what was really in their hearts, which was rebellion against God, disobedience toward His Word, and a failure to recognize His holy will and way for their lives. Thus, disrespect and irreverence became the mark of their dress.

I think there are some practical points of application that we can glean from this passage of Scripture. First, our manner of dress can reflect rebellion against God and His holy standards. *The way we dress in society can reflect what we think about God. We can dress in an immodest fashion (flesh), in a way that promotes and glamorizes our body (pride), in a unisex fashion that blurs the distinctions among the sexes (rebellion), and in a prideful or showy manner (worldly). When we dress in these ways it reveals that we have adopted the value system of the heathen culture and are in some respect rebelling against God and His holy pattern for our lives.* When we allow the heathen cultural customs of dress to overtake our hearts it will be evidenced in our apparel and overall appearance. When this happens God calls our manner of dress “strange apparel” (Zephaniah 1:8).

For instance, when I want to look like someone of the opposite sex, or when I choose to dress in an inappropriate manner that reveals my body in a *sexual* and *showy* manner, it's then that I am dressing in rebellion against God and His holy ways for my life. I send a message that I'm more interested in doing what I want to do than in what God wants for my life. Dressing in a manner that promotes my body and which defies decency and respect among society portrays the message that rebellion is in my heart, a rebellion against God and His holy pattern for my life (Deut. 31:27; Prov. 17:11). I'm sending the message that I want my own life to be promoted instead of God's life and His purpose for my life. So the way we dress and the appearance we give does send a message up to God and to those who see us. When we desire to dress in a way that draws attention to ourselves we can be sure that we have absorbed the values of our unsaved

culture and that we are in rebellion against God. Don't fool yourself. Look at the way you dress. If you are dressing in a worldly fashion (lustful and prideful way) then you can be sure that you are in rebellion against God and are wearing "strange apparel" that shows disrespect for God and lacks reverence toward His holy ways for your life.

A second practical point of application from this verse (Zephaniah 1:8) is this. When we approach God in our times of worship we should always remember to demonstrate respect by the manner in which we dress. The people were disrespectful in their dress when worshipping God.

Zephaniah 1:5

"And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship *and* that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham."

The people were worshipping false gods in their time of worship and their adopted heathen or foreign dress was the telltale sign that they were rebellious toward God and that they had lost their reverence and respect for the true God of heaven. Their syncretism in worship was disrespectful toward God since He is the only true God (1 Cor. 8:5-6) and their dress was equally disrespectful because it demonstrated they had absorbed the worship customs of the pagan people and had lost true reverence for the holy God of heaven.

So our text reveals that the way we dress for corporate worship (church) can reflect a genuine heart attitude of obedience and reverence toward God! When we attend church and dress in an improper way (disrespectfully, immodestly, worldly, pridefully, showy, and sloppily) we can reflect a heart attitude of rebellion and general disrespect, or lack of reverence for God, His House, His Word, and overall decency. *Our attire and the attention we give to our appearance sends a message to those around us of our inner thinking and feelings about God.* The same is true about our worship. What we think about God shows up in how we act and look when worshipping God. The appearance (how we look), the attire (how we dress), and the attitude (how we think) actually work together. As my heart gets squared away with God my body will get squared away

with my heart (1 Pet. 3:3-4). If my heart is right toward God my dress will not demonstrate disrespect toward God. My body will eventually catch up with my heart.

One preacher told me that a group of baseball players came into a church wearing their baseball caps and when he kindly told them to remove the hats one man became so angry with him that he threatened to punch him in the nose! Sadly, it was not any of the baseball players but another Christian! The point is this. As a person grows in their understanding of God their reverence for Him will be demonstrated by their dress. This will be true in every culture and country in spite of the differences among dress. Reverence and respect can always be demonstrated in our manner of dress as we corporately gather to worship God. Young believers need to be taught about the important enduring principle of reverence for God in times of corporate worship (Lev. 19:30 – “reverence my sanctuary”).

Verses like 1 Samuel 16:7 (“for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart”) and John 7:24 (“Judge not according to appearance”) cannot be used to promote disrespectful dress in God’s House of worship. *No verse in the Bible should ever be used to demote respect and reverence for God’s holiness.* In the first place, God was actually referring to the outward countenance of a person and not to his dress (1 Sam. 16:12). Likewise, Jesus was talking about judging falsely in connection with His actions upon the Sabbath day and not His dress (John 7:23). The religious people accused Jesus of working on the Sabbath when healing a man. The primary emphasis of these passages has nothing to do with how we present ourselves before the Lord in dress when we come to church and worship Him. Therefore, they cannot be used as a scapegoat to promote disrespectful dress when attending church since they have no direct relationship to dress, nor are they focusing on how we are to worship God.

Of course, we can derive an important enduring principle from them as we come to worship God. But these texts do not advocate the right to dress down (“come as you are”) and lack reverence or respect for God when we come to church. *The principle and point that God is making seems to be that we should not neglect the inward heart at the expense of only emphasizing the outward.* Here is an important

principle we can take from these verses. Godliness in itself and true worship is not only measured by the outward appearance. Our outward actions, charisma, worship, dress, and appearance are not the only sign that indicates we have a right heart toward God. True godliness and worship cannot be measured by mere outward looks and actions. Jesus said in Matthew 15:8: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.” A smiling face, outward charisma, charm, and even proper dress do not necessarily represent an inward godly heart that is open to God. Real worship takes place on the inside of a person’s spirit where he can communicate to God from a sincere or non-hypocritical heart (John 4:24).

We must remember that spirituality is not gained by conformity to a set of appearance standards. Please don't make this mistake. A person can be straight down the line with an impeccable appearance and be as mean as the devil. Superficial spirituality is not what we're after. We want the genuine thing. This is an important lesson to remember. At the same time, we must not lose sight of how the heart’s attitude of reverence toward God’s holiness is also reflected in the way that we dress when coming to worship God on Sunday (Psalm 96:9). It’s true that God is interested in the inner man (1 Pet.3:4) but it is equally true that if the inner man is developing as it should, then this should have some effect on the outer man (1 Pet. 3:3-5). So God certainly does not look past the outward as so many suggest today. He called the people’s clothing “strange apparel” (Zeph. 1:8) because of the way they dressed. The way they dressed in the time of worship reflected that something was wrong on the inside of their hearts. Their dress reflected a lack of reverence and respect toward God and revealed that the people had adopted worldly values and ideas. Let us remember one thing. *God never said that He despised the outward part of man when it comes to worshipping or reverencing Him.*

Somehow our dress can and does reflect that we have a prepared heart and sincere or truthful heart ready to worship God. Our dress can become a beautiful outward expression of an inward heart of reverence that bows before the majesty of God’s holiness (see Psalm 89:7; Heb. 12:28). Reverence is an inward attitude of worship, which is inevitably reflected in our outward conduct, actions, and even

dress. Reverence in worship is demonstrated toward God by the outward manifestation of our conduct, actions, and dress. *Proper dress can become part of our outward expression of reverence, adoration, and worship toward God.* One must wonder what the inward attitude of a person is toward God when he wants to come to church dressed irreverently and disrespectfully. Dressing neatly tells God that we care about Him.

It's true that partiality should not be shown to others (poor people) over the matter of dress within the assembly (James 2:2). On the other hand, we must teach the principle of reverence and respect for God's House. *Even the poorest of saints can demonstrate respect.* The church today needs to start reprogramming her mind and get back to a worship that is filled with deep reverence and respect for God, which will be reflected in all of her actions, songs, dress and teaching. When we come together as a company of believers we are sending a message up to God. We are saying: "God, this is what we think of You when corporately worshipping together. This is how we want to present ourselves to You and act before You as our God. Oh great God of wonders this is the message we want to convey to You as the eternal, righteous, and holy God." The attitude of dressing-down ("come as you are") is an irreverent and disrespectful attitude straight from the guru books of church marketing techniques. God has one thing to say about this kind of down-dressing approach to worship – "strange apparel."

Don't forget the inward heart. How true! But one must wonder how much the heart reverences God for His holiness, purity, and majesty when we forget about our outward appearance. The little saying summarizes it well: **"God does not care what we wear to church (in comparison to the heart) but what we wear to church (our outward dress on Sunday) tells how much we care about God."** This little saying seems to maintain the proper Biblical balance by expressing the truth that God views the heart as the most important part of worship. And at the same time it expresses another truth. We should demonstrate how much we care about God by reverencing Him in our manner of dress and all of our aspects of corporate worship.

Psalm 89:7 says:

“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all *them that are* about him.”

We must never forget that when we come together to worship God, as a body of believers on Sunday, we are sending a message up to God concerning what we think about Him. The way that we act and dress tells God what we really think about Him as “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God” (1 Tim. 1:17) and the holy God “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” in Heaven (Isaiah 6:1-5).

A.W. Tozer said it best:

“But a man who has passed through the veil and looked even briefly upon the holy place of Isaiah’s God can never be irreverent again.”