

CHRISTIAN DRESS AND ADORNMENT – PART 1

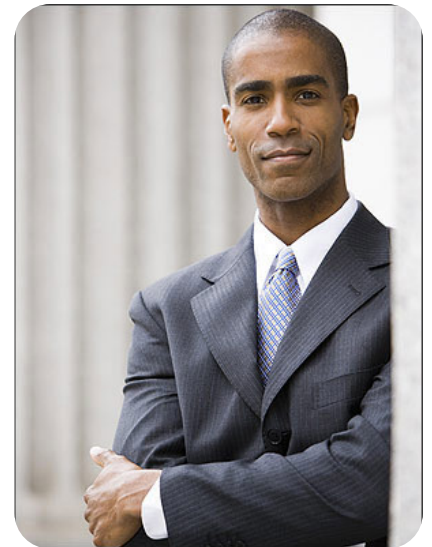
Biblical Standards

“Biblical standards are God’s instruments, through the work of the Spirit, in the internalisation of heavenly values and in the concrete expression of a heavenly lifestyle on this planet.... The Lordship of Christ encompasses every dimension of the human being (health and temperance, social life, use of money, etc.), not just our spirituality.”¹ In this article we will carefully examine the standard on ‘Dress and Adornment.’

CHRISTIAN DRESS²

Introduction

- Our outward appearance tells more about who we are than many of us realise.
- William Thourlby, an acclaimed clothing consultant, who advises executives and presidents on “how to package yourself for success,” says that when people meet you for the first time, they will make judgments about you, based solely on your appearance. Some of these are: your economic level, your educational level, your trustworthiness, your social position, your success and your moral character.
- Some dress for self:
 - Some want to be admired as persons of distinction
 - Others dress to get attention or bolster their self-confidence
 - A few go to extremes to wear quirky little items of dress to alert others that they are individualists
- Some dress to please others:
 - If your date likes the colour blue, you will find a blue shirt or top for your next occasion together.
 - Even though you may be comfortable in a well-worn blue jeans and a faded T-shirt you would not wear them to a job interview.
 - Most dressing is not just personal preference
- What are the motives behind your dressing?



Here are six principles a Christian should keep in mind concerning dress:

Principle One: Christians should dress, not to please self or others, but to glorify God.

The Christian goal is to “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). We are “living epistles” that can be known and read by all (2 Cor 3:2, 3). If the outward appearance does not match the inward condition of the soul, we breed confusion.

¹ Rodriguez, *Jewelry in the Bible*, pg. 10.

² This section is largely drawn from Laurel Damsteegt’s article, *A Practical Look at a Christian’s Clothing*, in Samuele Bacchiocchi’s book, *Christian Dress & Adornment*, pgs. 173-197.

Principle Two: A Christian should dress and act in a modest way, sufficiently covering the body to avoid embarrassment or temptation (1 Tim 2:9).

- The Bible encourages us to cover our bodies so nakedness does not appear (Ex. 20:26; 28:42).
- Modern fashion however attempts to expose and show off the body, especially the thighs, buttocks, stomach and breasts. Christians should avoid all such exposure.
- Notice what Mary Quant, designer of the mini skirt had to say:³
 - “My aim is to dress women so men would feel like tearing the wrapping off”
 - “If the clothes don’t make you feel noticed, then I think they’re a waste of money”
 - When asked, ‘What is the point of fashion, where is it leading?’ she promptly replied, ‘Sex’



Worldly Fashion

- In an interview published in *Newsweek*, Mary Quant said: “Am I the only woman who has ever wanted to go to bed with a man in the afternoon? Any law-abiding female, it used to be thought, waits until dark. Well there are lots of girls who do not want to wait. Mini-clothes are symbolic of them.”
 - Even persons who are covered completely can be immodest, if their clothing is tight and revealing.
 - Modesty does not only refer to clothing, but also to behaviour. A person can dress modestly but behave immodestly (e.g., by being flirtatious).
 - Modesty applies to males as well. Half unbuttoned shirts to reveal muscles, tight fitting clothes, etc., are some elements of male immodesty.



Male Immodesty

Principle Three: The clothes and appearance of a Christian should be neat and clean.

- Sometimes we get the idea that simplicity means poor taste, slovenliness or being untidy. It is not. So don't forget to iron your clothes, sew on that button that fell off or polish your shoes. These are practical expressions of your Christian faith.
- Cleanliness is not an option either. We do not represent Jesus well with dirty, messy clothes. Of course, if you are on a construction job, or working in the garden, there is place for dirtiness. But when you get home, have a shower and look your best—for Jesus' sake.



Dirty Clothing

³ Bacchiocchi, pg. 63.

Principle Four: A Christian can shun extravagance yet choose nice-looking clothes that are of good quality, superb fit, and durable.

- Sometimes it's good to buy inexpensive clothing because they will not be worn for long, e.g., when children are growing up. Adults however can wear clothes for years and therefore quality and durability should be considering factors when buying clothes. Especially in seasonal climates where clothing is used for only a few months out of a year one can wear the same clothing year after year, if it has taste and quality. "Our clothing while modest and simple, should be of good quality, of becoming colors, and suited for service. It should be chosen for durability rather than display."⁴
- After doing a comparative search, one can find clothes that look good, feel wonderful, and are durable. First, choose quality cloth that does not require high upkeep, and a style that is *classic*. Such clothing may be a bit more expensive up front, but it will save time and money over the years.
- Extravagance emerges from excess. It is not extravagant to have good quality clothes that fit well and are pleasant and comfortable to wear. But if your wardrobe is so filled with beautiful, good quality clothes that you have not been able to wear some items for months or even years, then it is time to stop buying more and to perhaps start giving away.
- If you have everything you need, do not buy again until your need is real. Resist the temptation to buy because something is on sale.
- Do not tempt yourself by window shopping or looking at endless catalogues. You will always see one more thing that you just *must* have. Do not spend the Lord's money to satisfy extravagant desires.
- Beauty in clothes starts with **style** rather than fashion. Some people mistakenly believe that fashion is just style. Fashion comes and goes but style remains.
- Classic or traditional styles have been appropriate for years and will never go out of fashion.

Principle Five: The clothing should ensure the health of the body by protecting it, rather than injuring it.

- Clothing should promote excellent circulation. Tight clothing constricts and causes not only immediate discomfort, but sometimes internal long-term injury to organs or blood vessels.
- Besides being problematic as far as modesty is concerned, tight clothes are also a health risk. Here are some documented health problems from wearing tight clothes:⁵
 1. **Tingling Thigh Syndrome:** Although rarely permanent, individuals who wear their jeans too tight can experience nerve problems called meralgia paresthetica.
 2. **Yeast Infection:** When women's pubic areas are kept tightly under wraps, the area becomes very warm and moist. This makes it a breeding ground for bacteria and, as a result, can cause yeast infections.
 3. **Back Pain:** When pants are too tight, and are low riding, this can cause nerve compression in the back (similar to the thigh problem).
 4. **Fainting:** Constricting clothing can restrict our ability to fully expand our lungs . . . making our breathing shallow, decreasing our oxygen intake [e.g., wedding undergarments, bustiers, corsets].



Wearing Tight Clothes

⁴White, *Ministry of Healing*, pg. 288.

⁵Source - <http://shine.yahoo.com/channel/health/7-health-problems-from-wearing-clothes-that-are-too-tight-491072>

5. **Acid Reflux/Heartburn:** Tight pressure against your stomach can increase abdominal pressure, causing acid to go back into your esophagus, resulting in heart burn and acid reflux.
 6. **Abdominal Pain/Constipation:** Tight pants can slow down the digestive process.
 7. **Headaches/Blurred Vision:** Wearing button-down shirts that are too tight in the collar or ties that are tied too tightly can decrease proper circulation to the brain and head.
- Adequately cover your body in cold weather, particularly the extremities. This is a key consideration for good circulation.⁶ In summer, wear a hat while working outside.
 - Shoes, most of all, should be comfortable. Shoes that are soft and have good arch support may initially be very expensive but are well worth it for they make such a difference in endurance when walking and standing. They help prevent general fatigue.



Principle Six: A Christian should dress according to their gender type and within their culture (as long as it does not go against biblical principles)

- There is an increasing tendency to blur the distinction between the dress of males and females. This can cause a great deal of confusion.
- A Christian should dress according to the gender type of their culture *as long as it does not go against biblical principles*. For example, in Scotland, it is acceptable for males to wear a kilt, but that would not work in Germany or South Africa. If however, the kilt were an immodest, short, tight fitting and sexy clothing item, a Christian would reject it, even if it were cultural.
- Notice what Deut. 22:5 says: “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the Lord your God.”
 - The principle from this command ensures that we do not blur or erase the social distinction between the sexes for any reason within the context of a given culture. If pants are commonly worn by both males and females, they are not a problem. However if only women normally wear dresses, a man should not wear a dress.⁷



Dressing to Church

- The main function of clothing in church is not to attract attention to one’s self, but to facilitate worship of God.
- “There should be no display of the apparel; for this encourages irreverence. The attention of the people is often called to this or that fine article of dress, and thus thoughts are intruded that should have no place in the hearts of the worshipers. God is to be the subject of thought, the object of worship; and anything that

⁶White, *Ministry of Healing*, pg. 293.

⁷ Comment in Andrews Study Bible under Deut. 22:5.

attracts the mind from the solemn, sacred service is an offense to Him” (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pg. 499).

‘Dress’ is a Sensitive Subject

- Since the subject of dress can cause a great deal of resistance, here are 3 things we can keep in mind:
 - **Educate the church membership.** Many Christians know very little about what the Bible teaches regarding lifestyle issues, including how to dress for Christ.
 - **Ask for a new heart.** Some people may say in their minds, “I know what the Bible says about dress is true, but I am not willing to change my wardrobe, give up my seductive clothing, part with my jewellery, etc.” Instead of offering a list of excuses why to not obey, rather ask God for a new heart to accept His will (Eze. 36:26-27), even though it may be very difficult initially.
 - **Always express love.** Love those who see nothing wrong with wearing earrings, bracelets, miniskirts, tight clothes, etc. Ask for a heart like Jesus’ and never exhibit a superior or judgmental attitude.

Conclusion

- **Avoid judging people by their appearance.** Jesus tells us, “Judge not;” for no one knows the heart. We can never know how the gentle Shepherd is leading another.
- **People judge us by our appearance.** We are not to judge others by their outward appearance, but we do have an obligation to reveal Christ to others by our own outward appearance. *We dare not judge others* by their appearance, yet *we dare not become a stumblingblock to others* by our appearance. Though others cannot read our heart they can read our clothes, hairstyle, makeup. Our outward appearance makes a powerful statement for Christ.

See Part 2 for full bibliography.

Compiled and adapted by Shandrell Penniken