

Biblical Teaching on Modesty in Dress

Sermon Notes

11/24/02 – F.S.

I Intro: All creatures and plants exist the way God created them, without any external coverings other than what God originally gave them. They stand before God in sinlessness and purity. Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed in the presence of God in the garden of Eden, UNTIL THEY SINNED.

They tried to cover themselves, but their covering was woefully inadequate (Gen 3:7). God himself provided an EXTERNAL covering for their INTERNAL sin (Gen 3:21). It was a sign and reminder that although they should have died, God provided a sacrifice to cover up their sin. Therefore, physical covering became a reminder, symbol and sign of:

- 1) humanity's sinful nature,
- 2) God's provision of an appropriate covering for human nakedness, and
- 3) God's protection (salvation) from divine judgment and death.

If we start to fall away from God, the enemy of our souls immediately tries to remove this symbol of God's covering over our lives: our clothing.

Eg. Noah – Gen 9:21: he got drunk and stripped naked
Demonic – Luke 8:27: naked, could not be restrained
Sons of Sceva – Acts 19:13-16: non-Christian exorcists stripped by demon

II It wasn't long before people forgot why clothing was necessary in the first place (i.e. sin). Instead of clothes being a constant daily reminder of their sinfulness and need for God's provision and protection, they became proud. They began adding extravagant ornaments to their clothes and bodies. In the eyes of God, this showed their wanton rebellion against him (Is. 3:16-24) and "stiffnecked" pride (Ex 33:5). These ornaments had to be removed to prevent the consuming wrath of God from falling on them (Ex 33:5-6).

After Jacob and Esau met, Esau wanted Jacob to come back with him to his home in Seir. Jacob said he would, but instead settled in Shechem. He built an altar there called "El-elohe-Israel", which literally means "God, the God of Israel" (Gen 33:12-20). Jacob and his family ran into problems there and God told them to move to Beth-El (House of God) to live. Before they left for Beth-El, to settle there and build an altar to the Lord, they buried their strange gods and earrings at Shechem (Gen 35:1-7).

Application: We can verbally acknowledge the fact that God is God (El-elohe), but if we're going to move into His house (Beth-el), where He wants us to be, we need to get rid of other gods and ornaments. We must lay aside all symbols of idolatry, rebellion and pride.

III God came to earth as a man; Jesus Christ. He was holy, blameless and sinless. At his crucifixion, he was shamed by being stripped naked. That which should have been the normal, natural appearance of a man had now become the greatest source of shame (Gen 2:25, Rev 3:18, Rev 16:15). **SIN AND IMMODESTY SHAMES US BOTH IN THE EYES OF GOD AND SATAN!** Nakedness symbolizes weakness, helplessness, ridicule, deprivation and scorn. In spite of this, Jesus triumphed over Satan, death, hell and the grave!!

John the revelator had a glimpse of how Jesus will appear in His glory, completely covered and modest, in direct contrast to the way human beings had shamed Him during His time on earth (see Rev 1:13). (Compare with description of priests clothing in Ex 28).

IV How **should** we dress today?

1Tim 2: 9-10 NKJV "... women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

1 Peter 3:4-5 NKJV "... let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves...."

The Bible gives us examples of God's instructions and actions concerning proper dress and adorning:

- He provided leather tunics for Adam and Eve to replace the fig leaf aprons they had made for themselves (Gen 3:7,21)
- We are kings and priests unto God; a holy nation! (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6) As His earthly representatives, God **does** want us to look good! The priests' garments described in Exodus show they were covered from head to toe in glorious, beautiful garments. Modesty was highlighted as even their undergarments covered their thighs (Ex 28:2,4,31-43).
- The angel at Jesus' empty tomb was clothed in a 'long white robe' (Mk 16:5) as Jesus also was in John's vision in Revelation (Rev 1:13)

Here's how **not** to dress:

Isaiah described the humiliation and shame of Babylon by comparing it to the humiliation of a cherished daughter with her legs exposed in public: "... Remove your veil, take off the skirt, uncover the thigh ... Your nakedness shall be uncovered, Yes, your shame will be seen...." Is 47:2-3a NKJV

Writing approximately 700BC, Isaiah described the spiritual condition of the daughters of Zion, their manner of dress and God's negative response to them: Isa 3:16-24, New Living Translation: 16 "Next the LORD will judge the women of Jerusalem, who walk around with their noses in the air, with tinkling ornaments on their ankles. Their eyes rove among the crowds, flirting with the men. 17 The Lord will send a plague of scabs to ornament their heads. Yes, the LORD will make them bald for all to see! 18 The Lord will strip away their artful beauty — their ornaments, headbands, and crescent necklaces; 19 their earrings, bracelets, and veils of shimmering gauze. 20 Gone will be their scarves, ankle chains, sashes, perfumes, and charms; 21 their rings, jewels, 22 party clothes, gowns, capes, and purses; 23 their mirrors, linen garments, head ornaments, and shawls. 24 Instead of smelling of sweet perfume, they will stink. They will wear ropes for sashes, and their well-set hair will fall out. They will wear rough sackcloth instead of rich robes. Their beauty will be gone. Only shame will be left to them."

Ezekiel 16: 1-19 is a tragic allegory regarding the degeneration of Jerusalem's relationship with God, who had been their sustainer, provider and spiritual spouse. Verses 10 -13 describe God's adorning of this 'young lady' with jewelry commonly used in our society today: bracelets, necklaces, nose studs and earrings. At the time this scripture was written, women would dress in this manner to display their beauty and desirability. Ezekiel then described how they used these ornaments to indulge in adultery and idolatry. They acted in the same manner as the children of Israel in Moses' time, (Ex. 32:1-6), and in Isaiah's time, (Is. 3:16-24). (See also Rev. 17:3-4).

Isaiah gave us a great insight into the way God teaches and leads us in the understanding of His will. "Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts? For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little." (Isa 28:9-10 NKJV). As we observe this principle in operation in scripture, God has given us a progressive revelation of His will concerning how we should dress, from Ezekiel to Paul and Peter. Paul instructs us: "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. (1 Tim 2:8-11 NKJV). Peter adds: Do not let your adornment be merely outward — arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel — rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. (1 Peter 3:2-5 NKJV).

Application: We should not use jewelry and fancy clothing to attract people to us, but, as mentioned above, a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. God does not want pride, idolatry, adultery or self-glorification to be incorporated into the way we dress, thereby attracting His displeasure toward us. Therefore, He gives us His Word, pastors, elders, family and friends to help us to please Him in this crucial area.

- When Noah's sons realized he was naked, they covered him: Gen 9:23
- When the demoniac was delivered, he put his clothes back on: Luke 8:35

- When we want to get close to God, we remove our vain ornaments: Gen 35:4, Ex 33:4-6

V The role of tradition

Definition: Traditions are commonly held actions, activities, beliefs, sayings and understandings sanctioned by a society, institution, country or family. Traditions give special meaning to things that have no inherent significance or value in and of themselves.

“Time honored traditions” as they are sometimes called, usually evolve over a long period, although significant events in the history of a group or an individual’s life may give rise to instant new traditions. (Anniversaries, Memorials, etc.)

Men’s neckties for example, serve no useful or practical purpose. In and of itself, a tie is pointless. Over time however, a tradition has developed regarding what it **means** to wear a tie. It means you’re “dressed up”. It is a sign of respect for the position you hold, the people you’re going to see, the institution you represent, the importance of a meeting, your status within an organization (or society in general) etc. Some of these policies have been adopted by Church elders over the years and incorporated into a tradition that men, (especially ministers), are expected to wear ties when going to the house of God.

Traditions, in and of themselves, are usually neither right nor wrong. They are often specific to a particular area, country, family or church. In the North American church for example, ties are used as a sign of respect for God and His house, and therefore should be worn out of respect for the saints, local assembly and the denomination. However, among many of the saints in Eastern Europe for example, a tie is a symbol of worldliness and vanity. Therefore if a man attends a service in that region, he *should not* wear a tie to church for exactly the same reason; respect for the house of God, the saints and traditions of that part of the world.

VI Ministry Application

- All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful (1 Cor. 6:10)
- Do all in your power to be effective in ministering to the greatest proportion of the church (1 Cor 9:22-23)
- Obey the Pastor as the person God has established to set the standards and obligations for ministers in the local congregation. Be humble and submissive. (Hebrews 13:17)
- What is of greater value? The freedom to dress as one pleases **OR** the freedom to minister to all saints in the house of God? (Romans 14:12,16,19; Romans 15:1-3)

May God help us to worship and honour Him in all things, including the way we dress!