

Holiness 3

Esther 2:2-4,8-9,12-13,15 Ephesians 4:11-13

SCRIPTURAL TEACHING ON ADORNMENT AND DRESS

“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” (I Timothy 2:9). *“Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the, hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel”* (I Peter 3:3). *“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”* (Deuteronomy, 22:5).

God desires for His people to display the spirit of holiness in outward appearance. Paul exhorted men and women to approach God in holiness, mentioning specific problems each sex had in his day. *“Therefore I desire 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”* (I Timothy 2:8-10, *NKJV*). As stated in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, *“Paul was shrewd enough to know that a woman’s dress is a mirror of her mind. Outward ostentation (pretentious show) is not in keeping with a prayerful and devout attitude. . . . Paul leaves no doubt as to what he means, by adding a list of prohibitions relating to outward adornment.*

To be modest means to be decent, chaste, proper, unpretentious and pure, with particular reference to dress, speech, conduct and deportment. The word *shamefacedness* (*KJV*) or *propriety* (*NKJV*) comes from the Greek word *aidos*. The *KJV* of 1611 used the word *shame fastness*, meaning to be steadfast in modesty.

Peter wrote, *“Likewise you wives, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some (husbands) do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your beauty be that out-ward adorning of arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament 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, being sub-missive to their own husbands”* (I Peter 3:1-5, *NKJV*). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* says of the wife in I Peter 3:1-6, *“She is not to seek attention by the artificiality’s of coiffure (far-out elaborate hairdos), jewelry, or ostentatious dress, but to be distinguished by that meek and quiet spirit, so rare in the world and so prized by God.*

Paul and Peter did not oppose the simple braiding or arranging of the hair. Many women of the day arranged their hair lavishly and extravagantly. They often braided into their hair strands of pearls and silk cords with gold coins attached. Many wore ornamental crowns and headdresses. These passages, then, reject very elaborate hair arrangements as well as the use of ornaments in the hair.

When we take Peter's advice and look at the holy women of the Old Testament, we find that women should not wear clothing pertaining to men, and vice versa (Deuteronomy 22:5). Protestant theologian Rousas Rushdoony said, "A fifth aspect of holiness has reference to dress. Transvestite dress is an 'abomination' to the Lord (Deuteronomy 22:5); it is a sterile and perverse hostility to God's created order." He went on to say "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 . . . Every violation or wiping out of a woman . . . was unnatural, and therefore an abomination in the sight of God."

The Spiritual Significance of Dress

The Bible does speak on the subject of adornment and dress. If we are to apply its teaching properly in our day, we must understand some of the underlying reasoning. Why is God concerned with the way we dress? Why is it important for Christians to maintain holiness in outward appearance?

* Our dress reflects what we truly are inside. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* says, "The clothing worn by the Hebrew people of Biblical times was graceful, modest, and exceedingly significant. They were considered so much a part of those who wore them that they not only told who and what they were, but were intended as external symbols of the individual's innermost feelings and deepest desires and his moral urge to represent God aright."

* As the preceding discussion indicates, our dress is an important statement to God. It signifies to Him our attitude, lifestyle, and choice of identity. Some say outward appearance is irrelevant because, "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (I Samuel 16:7).

* Our dress reveals to others our commitments and beliefs. It is important for Christians to appear to be holy and godly in front of others. Since man does look on the outward appearance, it is important for Christians to display godliness in outward appearance.

People everywhere use dress to identify themselves with certain beliefs and lifestyles. We can give many examples: dress and hairstyle of hippies in the 1960's, Mao suits of the Communist Chinese, the use of uniforms by many organizations, business clothes, clothing of ethnic groups, similarity of dress among teenagers, dress of rock stars and fans, styles worn by homosexuals, clothing worn by prostitutes, and fads and fashions in general.

Biblical Examples: Immodesty

The Bible contains a number of examples that illustrate the problems we have discussed. When Adam and Eve sinned they became aware of their nakedness and sought to cover themselves with fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). Originally, God created their bodies with glory and beauty. There was no need for false modesty between husband and wife, for they were one flesh. After they sinned, however, they recognized that wholesome, God-given sexuality had the capacity for evil. God gave them a sense of shame so they would cover their bodies, thereby minimizing temptation for sexual sin in the future. The clothing they made was inadequate; God had to cover them with garments made from animal skins (Genesis 3:21).

From that time forward, immodest exposure of the body has often resulted in sin. In fact, “to uncover nakedness” is an Old Testament idiomatic expression for sex acts (Leviticus 18:6-19). When David saw Bathsheba bathing, he yielded to the temptation to commit adultery (II Samuel 11:1-5).

Satan delights to cause immodest exposure of the body. The demons in the maniac of Gadara caused him to tear his clothes off, but when Jesus cast the demons out the man began to wear clothes (Luke 8:26-36). God compared Babylon’s downfall to a woman’s shame in having her nakedness exposed, when she bares her leg and uncovers her thigh (Isaiah 47:1-3), the same is true for men (Exodus 20:26

Biblical Examples: Makeup

Without exception, the Bible always associates the use of makeup with wicked women. When heathen Queen Jezebel tried to seduce Jehu so that he would not execute her, she used makeup and ornamentation. “And when Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window” (II Kings 9:30, *NKJV*). Solomon warned young men to avoid the immoral woman, who would use painted eyelids as one of her seductive techniques. “Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, Nor let her allure you with her eyelids” (Proverbs 6:25, *NKJV*).

God compared His unfaithful people to an adulteress who adorns herself for her lovers. “And when you are plundered, What will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, Though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, Though you enlarge your eyes with paint, In vain you will make yourself fair; Your lovers will despise you; They will seek your life” (Jeremiah 4:30, *NKJV*).

Biblical Examples: Jewelry

The Bible frequently associates jewelry with a proud attitude, an immoral lifestyle, or pagan worship. When Jacob went back to Bethel to renew his relationship with God, he disposed of all the idols and earrings belonging to his family (Genesis 35:1-7).

The Israelites melted down earrings and made a golden calf to worship (Exodus 32:2-4). After Moses interceded for them, God spared their lives but announced He would not go with them to Canaan. "And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man did put on him his ornaments. For the LORD had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a stiffnecked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee. And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount Horeb" (Exodus 33:4-6). As a sign of their humility, repentance, and consecration, God ordered them to take off these badges of vanity, pride, and lust. They gave all their jewelry to God, to be melted down and used in construction of the Tabernacle (Exodus 35:22).

Where did they get this jewelry originally? They received "jewels" of silver and gold from the Egyptians (Exodus 11:2). God meant for them to take the Egyptian gold and silver for use in His service, not for personal ornamentation.

The adulterous woman in Jeremiah 4:30 used extravagant clothing and ornaments of gold to attract her lovers. The adulterous woman in Ezekiel 23:40 also allured her lovers by ornaments. Her many lovers gave her bracelets and crowns, but God warned that all her jewels would be stripped away in judgment (Ezekiel 23:26, 42). Again, in Hosea 2:13, God likened His unfaithful people to an adulterous woman who wore jewelry: "She decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the LORD."

The spirit of Esther stands in contrast to this. When a woman was brought before the Persian king, she was allowed access to anything she desired in order to beautify herself (Esther 2:13). This included jewelry and cosmetics, which ancient royal courts used. Esther, however, desired and requested nothing, but used only what the king's eunuch (who had charge of her) selected (Esther 2:15). The Bible only records that she used oil of myrrh, perfume, and other preparations to purify the skin (Esther 2:12).

Sex Distinction in Dress

At least part of our daily attire must be exclusively associated with our gender, providing an unmistakable visual identification at first impression. Men should not wear attire that is distinctively female, which for Western clothing means dresses and skirts. Women should not wear attire that is distinctively male, which for Western clothing means trousers, slacks, or pants. Different cultures have different types of clothing. If clothing is modest and if there is a clear differentiation between male and female. Care should be taken to dress appropriately for the culture and occasion. Priests in the Old Testament wore breeches or trousers (Leviticus 6:10; 16:4), indicating that this has been distinctively masculine attire in Judeo-Christian culture from the earliest times.

Modesty of Dress

We seek to be decent, chaste, and proper in dress, specifically avoiding immodest exposure of the body before someone of the opposite sex (other than one's spouse). What

is considered immodest? In answering this question we must look to the biblical context, the purpose behind modesty, our culture, and our motives.

If we take I Timothy 2:9 seriously, we must agree that some clothing is immodest. Those articles of clothing which are one step away from nudity—such as bikinis, miniskirts, shorts, and halter tops—must be considered immodest. Otherwise, no clothing could be immodest.

The basic reason for modesty of dress is to subdue the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. The exposed body tends to arouse improper thoughts in both wearer and onlooker. To implement the purpose behind modest dress, the body should basically be covered, except for those parts, which we must use, openly for normal living. This suggests that clothes should cover the torso and upper limbs. Reasonable guidelines, then, would be women's dresses over the knee and sleeves near the elbow. In addition, we should avoid low necklines, sleeve-less dresses or shirts, very tight clothes, very thin clothes, and slacks on women because they immodestly reveal the feminine contours of the body. Likewise, swimming in mixed company is immodest.

The heart must be modest and motives pure. Conduct, gestures, gait, body language, and speech must be modest. If a woman wants to, she can display her body immodestly and act seductively even in the most modest of dresses. We must never use dress to promote immodest conduct, and no degree of external modesty can cover up an immodest, lustful spirit.

Adornment

Christians should avoid outward adornment (decoration or ornamentation). True adornment in the sight of God and godly men is holiness of spirit, not physical beauty. As part of Christian stewardship of the body, we believe in being physically fit, neat, clean, and attractive. We should not place undue emphasis on physical beauty; we should seek to present ourselves as best we can, using natural rather than artificial methods. We should avoid colored makeup, tattoos, and ornamental jewelry because their sole purpose is ornamentation of the body. We have seen many Old Testament passages that associate jewelry and especially makeup with evil. I Timothy 2:9 and I Peter 3:3 stand in direct opposition to gold, silver, and precious stones for personal ornamentation; apparently they are always excessive in appearance and cost.

When do clothing, hair arrangement, and functional jewelry become extravagant, excessively ornamental, or unreasonably expensive? The answer may vary somewhat depending on culture, society, station in life, and occasion. Here are some questions to consider in making this evaluation:

* What is my motive for wearing it? Do I wear it out of pride, show, a desire to be noticed, a desire to provoke envy?

* Is this wise stewardship on my part? How does it compare with the time and money I spend for necessities, for others, for God's church?

* How do others view it? Do they see it as flaunting wealth, showy, a manifestation of pride, or an object of envy? Do they see it as inconsistent with the Bible's stand and my own stand against ornamentation in general?

* What would Jesus do? Would He wear it? Would He spend His time and money in this fashion?

Rings

What about rings, rings are undoubtedly a form of jewelry? There seems to be no clear way to distinguish a finger ring from an earring, a nose ring, or a bracelet. As with other jewelry, the primary motivation for wearing rings seems to be for ornamentation, show, and impressing others. One possible exception might be wedding rings, particularly simple wedding bands. Arguably, they could have a functional use far more significant than any ornamental use. However, many people use even wedding rings to satisfy their desire for expensive, showy ornamentation. Both toleration and caution are necessary in this area.