

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 4)

Clothing Shows We Are Redeemed

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I want to make sure that you understand why I am going into this subject in such detail. I want you to clearly see that any of the church's dress codes were not randomly plucked out of the air, and neither were they the ideas of an 80-year old Victorian prude. I want you to see that there is a solid biblical base for them. At the foundation of this issue is God Himself, because He is the most important of all, and it is our responsibility to glorify Him in all things.

We accomplish this glorification of Him by seeking to know Him, to know what His standards are, and what His point of view is, and He has a point of view on everything. His point of view should become *our* point of view. Life following conversion is devoted to seeking His point of view, and then applying it in our life. This, brethren, is all important. It is not merely a matter of knowing, but rather of knowing and doing well.

Evelyn had a very interesting experience along this line a number of years ago. This was while we were still living in Columbia, South Carolina. We had a Methodist preacher who lived right across the street from us. He was retired, but was still on as an assistant at the local United Methodist Church. Anyway, he was a subscriber to the *Plain Truth* magazine. One day they were out there talking over the fence like neighbors do, and he was wondering how the Worldwide Church of God could produce such a fine magazine and send it out to millions of people. He knew that took a great deal of money. Evelyn said to him, "Well, we tithe." In her simplicity she said, "We believe in tithing, and we tithe. We do it." This Methodist minister said, "We believe in tithing too, but our people will not do it." There is a lesson there. It is not a matter of knowing. It is a matter of knowing and *doing* that is going to be helpful to us.

This is where things get difficult, because the heart resists change from all of those habits engraved upon it. In defense of itself, it devises justification. Right here where the rubber hits the road and the major issue?deliberately and voluntarily taking the responsibility to govern ourselves to submit?comes to the fore.

Now does God have the right to demand or require these things of us? Yes He does, on the basis of two major reasons. First, He is our Creator, and He has every right to command us to choose to submit to what He wills. We will pay no more attention to this obvious truth. The second reason though is more difficult to continually appreciate. This is because it is spiritual in nature, and as such, it is something that more easily slips from our mind. It is not something that we tend to constantly be aware of, and this is *who we are spiritually*. We are *the redeemed of God*. We must strive to *never* let this slip from our minds, because it sets the point of view from which we look at everything in life. As the redeemed, our choices become exceedingly more important.

The words "redeemed," "redeemer," and "redemption" are used four different ways in Scripture and appear over 160 times in the Bible. Those words are used in the sense of "*to buy back*", "*to*

set one free by paying a ransom", "*to rescue from loss*," and "*something to loosen with*." The clearest illustration of a physical redemption in all of Scripture is Israel's redemption from their physical slavery to Pharaoh and Egypt. In Deuteronomy 7, Moses wrote:

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 The LORD did not set his love upon you [Israel], nor choose you because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, has the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

The most important redemption though is through Jesus Christ paying the ransom price as the sacrifice of *His* life to rescue us from our spiritual slavery to Satan, sin, and death from spiritual Egypt.

Galatians 3:13-14 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree; that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

You can see that we are redeemed with things in mind?good things for you and me.

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Again, we are redeemed for a purpose?that we might be adopted into the family of God.

Ephesians 1:6-7 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

I am not going to be going through all the scriptures that mention redemption, but I just want to give you enough so that you will be impressed that this is no little subject. It is very important to our well-being that we understand this.

Colossians 1:13-14 Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

Hebrews 9:12-15 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

I Peter 1:18-19 Forasmuch as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conduct received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

One of the major concepts critical to our understanding of what life is about is what this does to us. Believe me, it puts us into a very deep sense of obligation if we understand this principle of redemption.

We are going to go back to Ezekiel 16: 4-8, because this is one of the effects that occur because we are redeemed. What we are going to be looking at here is a redemption taking place, but it is given in figurative language in which God is talking to Israel personified as one woman.

Ezekiel 16:4-8 And as for your nativity, in the day you were born your navel was not cut, neither were you washed in water to supple you: you were not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied you, to do any of these unto you, to have compassion upon you: but you were cast out in the open field, to the loathing of your person, in the day that you were born. And when I passed by you, and saw you polluted in your own blood, I said unto you, when you were in your blood, Live; yes, I said unto you when you were in your blood, Live. I have caused you to multiply as the bud of the field, and you have increased and grown great, and you are come to excellent ornaments: your breasts are fashioned, and your hair is grown, whereas your were naked and bare. Now when I passed by you, and looked upon you, behold, your time was the time of love; [Redemption is coming!] and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yes, I sware unto you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine.

In the New Testament you will read that we are the *purchased possession*. In this section God is describing a portion of the redemption process, but it is in physical terms. But the

conclusion is important for the purpose of this sermon, and that is found in that last phrase: "*You became Mine.*" This obligates us to certain things. Again we are going to go back to the New Testament to I Corinthians 6 and we will string three scriptures together.

I Corinthians 6:20 For you are bought with a price.

We saw that the price was the blood of Jesus Christ. It cost the life of our Creator and our Savior for us to be purchased, to be *the redeemed*.

I Corinthians 6:20 For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

I Corinthians 7:21-23 Are you called being a servant [slave]? Care not for it: [Do not be overly concerned or anxious about it.] but if you may be made free, use it rather. [Go ahead and do it.] For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's slave. [There is the effect of redemption. We become Christ's slave.] You are bought with a price; be not you the servants [or slaves] of men.

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people: that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Spiritually we are literally *owned* by Jesus Christ and as such He has every right to order us to do anything He wishes, including dying for Him. His ownership in turn obligates us. We are duty-bound to do whatever He wishes. If you know anything about slaves, you understand that slaves have no choice. Our responsibility He has given in a generality?we are "to show forth His praises." That is what it says in I Peter 2: 9. It helps us to see the issue of this subject in its larger context.

Now everyone of us must surely see that the conduct and the attitude of the people in this world needs to be changed, but nothing will ever change unless those populating this world take the responsibility upon themselves to change themselves. And yet, brethren, you know that will never happen as long as everything remains as it is, because Satan's grip on people's hearts is too great. So God is taking it directly in hand to change a small number of people?to get them ready for when He moves in force on the whole world. That group is the church, and He is educating us to His standards, and at the same time testing us to see whether we will live up to those standards so that we are prepared to be teachers and guides for those who will come along later.

He prepares us in the way He does so that we will understand through hands-on-experience, as

well as mere head knowledge, that His way is right. Thus through that experience His way will be engraved upon our character as well as just being a matter of knowledge.

The subject of formality and decorum is just a small part of that much larger spiritual-redemption picture. We need to ask ourselves the question: Since we are the redeemed, what should the redeemed wear? What obligation do we have in regard to dress and to decorum? This is not an unimportant question, as we will see more clearly as we move along. I went through all that detail regarding "who we are" *the redeemed of God*? because it has a direct connection to this subject of formality and decorum.

We saw in the last sermon that there is a direct connection to "who we are" regarding hair length. Neither a circumcision of the flesh nor a circumcision of the heart is visible on the outside, but God has ordered a small piece of visible external evidence through hair length to serve as a witness. We are going to see that this is not unusual for Him to do something like this.

Now there is even a more direct, more visible, and more important parallel regarding clothing. I am going to read an opening paragraph under the heading of "garments" from *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Page 317.

The imagery of garments and clothing is of *the* major importance in the Bible. Its significance can be physical, economic, social, moral, or spiritual. The imagery of investing or divesting a person of clothing is usually symbolic of larger issues. The function of clothing moreover is multiple. Clothing can protect, conceal, display, or represent a person's current state, and can be symbolic of moral and spiritual quality. The fact that garments wear out is also important.

It is no exaggeration to say that one can trace the whole outline of biblical theology and salvation history through the motif of clothing.

There is no doubt that clothing is one of the most important symbols used in the entirety of the Bible. The Bible very clearly uses clothing as an external figurative statement on our internal spiritual state. What a person wears is not unimportant. It *should* portray his spiritual state. It should portray that he is one of *the redeemed*.

This is not an uncommon practice in the religious world. For instance, Muslims require their women to wear black burqas. In one church that I pastored we invited a number of people to fellowship with us one Sabbath, and all of their women showed up dressed *entirely* in white robes.

Some far eastern religions wear saffron robes. You see these people all over the place. You see them in airports. They have their hand out for money. It is like a uniform. The Anabaptist group, like the Amish and the Mennonites, almost all wear dark muted colors. The women wear veils on their heads, and their dresses have very low hemlines. This principle is also one of the reasons why the military wears uniforms. Clothing sets one off. It identifies. For us, it is to serve as a gentle silent witness. It is just as if it is talking. It is just as if it is giving a testimony of who we are. Its imagery portrays whether one is redeemed or unredeemed, converted or unconverted,

of this world, or in the Kingdom of God. God wants His children's spiritual state to be paralleled in the same general manner as hair length portrays its small role in one's witness of what they are.

I am going to give you a brief overview of more specifically what I mean. We are going to go to Luke 15. You will see that this chapter is about *The Prodigal Son*.

Luke 15:17-24 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you. And am no more worthy to be called your son: make me as one of your hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him: and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it: and let us eat and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again: he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Let us notice the pattern that is shown here. The son was wallowing in sin. He came to himself. That is, he came to perceive his degenerate spiritual state. In other words, he repented. And so he got himself up, and he returned to his father, and he confessed his sin. The father showed his willingness, even before his son confessed, by treating him kindly. The father responded immediately upon confession, and the first thing that he did was put the best robe on his son, and a ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet, and he threw a joyous party. What we are looking at here is a repentance and redemption. All of these symbols portray the imagery of a dramatic and a good change in the son's life. Putting on the best robe was *not* insignificant. It was the first thing that he did.

Genesis 2:25 And they [Adam and Eve] were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Genesis 3:7-10 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where are you? And he said, I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked: and I hid myself.

Genesis 3:21 Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make

coats of skins, and clothed them.

I want you to notice the first two terms in Genesis 2: 25: (1) they were naked, and (2) they were not ashamed. This imagery is teaching us, that before sin, they were clothed in innocence. They were like little children. Recall that Jesus said that unless we become like little children we are not going to be in the Kingdom of God. The primary image that comes from this is *integrity, innocence, spiritual moral wholeness*. They were unspoiled by sin.

Next I want you to leap in thought to Genesis 3: 10, and notice three more terms. Adam said: (1) afraid, (2) naked, (3) and they hid. The imagery here teaches us that sin *will*, and still does, pervert the mind. That was its fruit. It perverted their mind. One of the major fruits is that sin alters our point of view. Whether we like it or not, whether we anticipate it or not, it is going to change the way we think about things, the way we view things, see things, perceive things. It is going to change our perspective.

What sin did was expose Adam and Eve to their self-centeredness, and it intensified their hearts' unlawful demand. One of the interesting things is one of the fruits of sin is that mankind became afraid of God. They were guilty, and they knew, and they were afraid of God. Just in case you think this is not important, in Hebrews 2: 15 it shows that fear is such an impelling and driving powerful force, that we are held in bondage to it. Jesus came to release us, redeem us from this fear that we are held in bondage to. Adam and Eve's altered point of view forced them to feel guilt and shame in addition to fear, and it moved them to cover their shame with totally inadequate man-made mini-skirted clothing. It certainly was not the best robe.

I do want you to turn to Hebrews 4, as we need to draw ourselves into this so that we know that we are really no different from Adam and Eve in regard to these things. They thought that they could hide.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

God sees right through all the falderal, right through our justifications, our rationalizations. He knows exactly why we did things.

Hebrews 4:13 Neither is there any creature [anything in creation, but mostly meaning us] that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do [or to whom we have to give answer].

Adam and Eve stood exposed in both body and mind before their Maker. The very intent of their heart was naked before Him. We must understand that it is totally unrealistic for us to think that He is somehow unaware of our activity. There is no hiding from Him. I bring this up because sometimes there are those whose faith is so weak that they will wear one manner of clothing to

services, and be much differently attired for other occasions, knowing full well that they are not going to come into contact with any church member, and so nobody else sees them. But, what about God?

From that point on in Genesis 2, nakedness and exposure of sexually arousing areas of the body become a symbol of shame. I am going to digress on this because it is quite important to this subject. This is going to be a fairly long digression. We are going to go to Isaiah 47: 1-10. Note especially to whom this is written.

Isaiah 47: 1-10 Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for you shall no more be called tender and delicate. Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover your locks, ?[make your hair shorn, which we saw in the last sermon was not good. It indicates the harlot.] ?make bare the legs, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers. Your nakedness shall be uncovered, yes, your shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and I will not meet you as a man. As for our redeemer, the LORD of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel. Sit you silent, and get you into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for you shall no more be called The lady of kingdoms. I was wroth with my people, I have polluted my inheritance, and given them into your hand: you did show them no mercy; upon the ancient have you very heavily laid your yoke. And you said, I shall be a lady forever: so that you did not lay these things to your heart, neither did remember the latter end of it. Therefore hear now this, you that are given to pleasures, that dwell carelessly, ?[Remember that *casual* means careless.] ?, that say in your heart, I am, and none else beside me: I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: But these two things shall come to you in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come upon you in their perfection for the multitude of your sorceries, and for the great abundance of your enchantments. For you have trusted in your wickedness: you have said, None sees me. Your wisdom and your knowledge, it has perverted you; and you have said in your heart, I am, and none else beside me.

This passage portrayed Babylon, symbolized as a woman. It is a mocking song, a taunt of what hypocritical Babylon truly is. This song is showing that God is going to expose Babylon's shame before the whole world. Notice the imagery He used to portray Babylon's shame. Babylon is much different than she thinks within her own deceitful heart, and shows externally that to outside senses. On the outside Babylon appears regal and beautifully dressed, but everything is exposed to God. The reality from God's point of view is that Babylon is *as/ave* to her vanity, so God portrays her as an adulteress, selling herself to the nations. "Bare the thigh," He says.

We are to learn practical things from these examples, because this imagery is another tool providing examples of God's point of view.

"Take off your skirt. Make bare your thigh." These are things that harlots do. Why? To attract attention as they ply their trade. From God's point of view, Babylon, despite looking on the outside very ladylike and regal, is in reality a *harlot*! How could He tell? By the way she was dressed! The way she dresses, in conjunction with her mannerisms, exposes the reality of her heart. Remember, we are supposed to show on the outside what really is in our heart. Do you know what? A lot of times we do, and God wants us to make it a good practice.

Proverbs 7:7-11 And [I] beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of a harlot, and subtil of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house.)

I want you to notice the characteristic God uses to describe a harlot. A harlot has a distinctive manner of dress and external mannerism, both of which are ploys used to draw attention to herself. She is an aggressive temptress. Verse 11 helps us understand the motivation for the attire mentioned in verse 10: "Loud and stubborn." Both of these terms suggest that this is a person who is unrestrained. A harlot is a woman without the self-control needed to earn His praise. Her suggestive clothing and mannerisms enhance the temptation.

Genesis 38:13-15 And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold your father in law [who was Judah] goes up to Timnath to shear his sheep. And she put her widow's garments off from her, [You see, her widow's garments would have identified her to the outside world as a *widow*.] and covered her with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which is by the way to Timnath; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife. When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a harlot; because she had covered her face.

Judah thought she was a harlot because of the way she was dressed. That is why it specifically said she took off her normal clothing. Now what was in her heart? She wanted a husband that was promised to her, and the way she decided to get it was to seduce Judah, and so she seduced him using clothing. That must have been, for the times anyway, pretty revealing, because he fell right into the trap.

God did not create the sexually arousing areas for the purpose of shame, but mankind misuses them, among which are the harlots deliberately drawing attention to them in plying of their trade, which brings God's condemnation, and shame. Unfortunately, those ploys are the stock-in-trade of the fashion industry.

In the summer of 1997 the fashion clothing designer Versace was murdered in Miami. For a while the newspapers and magazines had a great number of articles about him containing opinions of him and his work. The following quotes about him are interesting.

Designer Gianni Versace understood that fashion was about more than clothes. He knew that a simple dress could also make allusion to art, music, architecture, and the cult of celebrity. His style was flamboyant, profoundly sexy, and often crossed the line into wonderful vulgarity. He unapologetically cut dresses obscenely low, and hems ridiculously high. He also cut a perfect suit that blended classic lines with delicate sensuality. Fashion for him was glamorous, colorful, sensual world. He was a homosexual, and he designed men's clothing accordingly.

It is not just women, it is men, or they at least look like men on the outside. All of these quotes came from the fashion world and its editors. Do they tell you anything about the world's approach to attire, and especially feminine attire? Ladies, do you understand that you are being victimized? Men have the power. Most of the designers are men, and they are victimizing you to please *their* hearts' desires.

Calvin Klein places new young women in tight jeans, and boy! he is proud of it. One of his ads proclaim: "Nothing could come between her and her Calvins." See, a double-entendre (a double meaning). They were so tight they were painted on! But the *Washington Times*, commenting on this, said in one of their editorials that Klein's TV ads were "all the sickening clichés of New York's child-sex industry." Those that have the power use the young women who want to get a name by exposing them to the public.

I am going to give you a string of scriptures that shows you what is driving this industry. They are all familiar scriptures I believe to all of you.

I John 2:15-17 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 passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever.

John wrote this as an overall general warning so that we would understand what is driving the machinery of business, of economics in this world. That was John's take on this. Let us look at Paul's.

I Timothy 6:9-10 But they that will be rich fall into temptations and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all [sorts] of evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, the love of money. Do you want to know how deeply engrained this is? Turn to Revelation 18. Here again we are looking at

Babylon at the *end* time.

Revelation 18:7-12 How much she has glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she said in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. [What vanity!] Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine: and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judges her. And the kings of the earth who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her shall bewail her, and lament for her when they shall see the smoke of her burning, Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour is your judgment come. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; [What are they crying about!] for no man buys their merchandise anymore: The merchandise