

Knowing God: Formality and Customs (Part 5)

Specifics Regarding Christian Adorning

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We know that "knowing God" is an all-important goal in our life if we ever are going to be in His image. How can we possibly make right choices and walk in His steps, conformed to Him, if we do not know what His point of view is?

Today I have a potpourri—a sort of salad-of-thoughts and evidences—of what God's point of view is on a number of loose ends that I think will help close off those ends in regards to this subject.

A number of times I have mentioned that the world essentially says that God only cares about what is in our heart, not what is on the outside. Brethren, that is nothing more than a deceived sheer-nonsense justification and excuse for a lazy, irreverent attitude toward God. People who say this are exposing either their ignorance of God, or their lack of love for God, or perhaps both. God is *very* concerned about both the inside *and* the outside.

You may recall in my last sermon I used Isaiah 47: 1-10, in which God shows a relationship between how a person dresses and the reality of what he is in his heart. Now added to this is that Jeremiah 17: 9 says "the heart is deceitful above all things, and is incurably sick." This fact in Jeremiah 17: 9 has a direct tie to the illustration God used in Isaiah 47. The deceived Babylon, portrayed as a woman, looks very attractive on the outside to the deceived, but God shows that Babylon herself is *among* the deceived. She says of herself that "she is a lady," when, by God's righteous judgment, she clearly is not. We are going to add another principle to this that also comes from the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 5:20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; [This is what we are seeing in Isaiah 47.] that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

He is talking about people who have everything backwards from the truth; that is, everything in terms of God and His purpose. He is talking about the *deceived*. They judge things from a different (than God's) and *wrong* point of view. They speak *admiringly* of Babylon, calling her "tender and delicate." But from God's point of view, the reality is shown when He tells her, "Take off your skirt and bare your thigh." He said that, because when God looks on her heart—the place where the conduct is generated—He sees a *harlot*.

This difference between perception and reality is important to understand. It is not difficult for one's "incurably sick heart" to see things *different* from their reality, and that is why it calls "evil good, and good evil."

Now this false perception is true regarding clothing styles. Every parent ought to understand this principle because of their experience with children. Children rankle under, and they groan,

resist, and fight against your decisions regarding what they *can* do and what they cannot do. The reason is they do not understand as fully as you that choices have consequences.

Clothing?what is worn on the outside?*should* reflect our conversion, witnessing that we are the sons of God. And at one and the same time, in a reciprocal manner, clothing will *affect* conduct. Marketers know this, and in terms of morality the conversion of our heart should always determine the selection of what we wear. Unfortunately, not everybody thinks this way, and it is very easy for our heart to misjudge clothing's affect on others and us. But brethren, it is not unimportant to God. Clothing is one of the *major* symbols used in the Bible to reflect a person's righteousness, and unrighteousness.

We are going to go back to the New Testament to one of Jesus' early teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 7:15 Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

This is exactly the way Babylon came to people. They thought she was *tender and delicate*. God saw that she was a *harlot*. Here Jesus is applying this same principle in regard to false ministers. On the one hand false ministers look, on the outside, as though they are all right, but actually on the inside they most assuredly are *not* all right.

A minute or so ago I said that not everyone thinks like God, and so here Jesus brings our attention to be on guard against false teaching. The illustration that He used reflects the subject of this sermon, and in fact this whole series. There are deceived people who distort the truths of God?God's Word?and misinform their hapless victims. In this case the sheep's clothing is being used as a deception much as in Isaiah 47. It is very interesting that Jesus used this term. Sheep's clothing confirms the fact that the sheep?God's representatives, God's children?should be known by the clothing they wear.

One of the indirect lessons of this little teaching right here is that clothing should match what is in the heart. God has made us, and in Psalm 100 He says, "We [His children] are the sheep of His pasture," and that His ownership of us should be visible by what we wear as part of the conduct of our life.

Jesus is warning us that some people appear to be one thing, but the reality is another. The truth is that "sheep's clothing" is *distinctive*. There should be a distinct and appropriate modesty in our attitudes, words, conduct, and our dress should also reflect the same.

Matthew 22:8-14 Then said he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go you therefore into the highways, and as many as you shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. And he said unto him, Friend, how came you in hither not having a wedding garment? And he

was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.

Again, Jesus makes use of the parallels, the symbolism, between one's outward appearance (clothing) and righteousness. They should *match* what is appropriate to the Bride's party. In this instruction the emphasis is aimed at *urging* us to understand and make use of the privileges of our calling while there is time. "Many are called, but few are chosen." He is urging us to conform to God's way, to be appropriately clothed with God's righteousness. There is a parallel all the way through the Bible between *clothing* and *righteousness*, and between *clothing* and *unrighteousness*. Once again, clothing is the illustration. There is definitely a tie between the symbolism of clothing, and the practical application in one's life.

Our clothing does not have to be uniform in the sense that the Amish draw it to, but it must be uniform in terms of morality and God's customs if we are going to please and glorify Him.

First I am going to read Revelation 3:17-19 from the *King James Version*, and then I am going to read it from the *Amplified Version* for a little bit of clarification.

Revelation 3:17-19 Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing: and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich: and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness do not appear: and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

From the Amplified Version:

Revelation 3:17-19 For you [a converted but deceived person] say, I am rich; I have prospered and grown wealthy, and I am in need of nothing; and you do not realize and understand that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to purchase from Me gold refined and tested by fire, that you may be [truly] wealthy, white clothes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nudity from being seen, and salve to put on your eyes, that you may see. Those whom I [dearly and tenderly] love, I tell their faults and convict and convince and reprove and chasten [I discipline and instruct them]. So be enthusiastic and in earnest and burning with zeal and repent [changing your mind and attitude].

Here we have the lackadaisical self-righteous church that thinks and acts to its deceived self that *it already has it altogether* (as we might say today). But from God's point of view, the

reality is again altogether different. In His judgment (just like His judgment of Babylon), they are "blind" and they are "naked" and cannot even see the fact that they lack the proper clothing.

Once again Jesus uses clothing that does not meet His standard to illustrate their true spiritual condition, telling them to repent and to *change* their clothing. God is once again illustrating righteousness and un-righteousness through the motif of how one is dressed.

Now just to reflect on something that appeared in a previous sermon in this series, I want to remind you that the roots of all of this is all the way back in Genesis 3 in Adam and Eve's experience in the Garden of Eden. When God's statements here are coordinated with all of the other references to clothing in Scripture, He is implying that the material external attire *is indeed indeed* a reflection of what is in the heart, and that as they move to change their spiritual condition of the heart, the change will be reflected in what they wear. So we move, symbolically, from filthy rags to sheep's clothing. Do you get the point?

Let us go now to Revelation 19, and we will take the "sheep's clothing" one step further.

Revelation 19:7-9 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready.

This is what she did with her life. She made herself ready to be approved before God, to make sure she was wearing the right things for her wedding.

Revelation 19:8-9 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white [symbolic of sheep's clothing]: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he said unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

Again I am going to read this from the *Amplified Version* to help clarify.

Amplified Version:

Revelation 19:7-9 Let us rejoice and shout for joy [exulting and triumphant]! Let us celebrate and ascribe to Him glory and honor, for the marriage of the Lamb [at last] has come, and His bride has prepared herself. She has been permitted to dress in fine [radiant] linen, dazzling and white?for the fine linen is [signifies, represents] the righteousness [the upright, just, and godly living, deeds, and conduct, and right standing with God] of the saints [God's holy people]. Then [the angel] said to me, Write this down: Blessed (happy, to be envied) are those who are summoned (invited, called) to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me [further], These are the true words [the genuine and exact declarations] of God.

Linen was the most readily available fine-clothing material of the day. By "*the day*", I mean at the time these things were written. Symbolically it is used throughout the Bible to represent success, wealth, and therefore power. When this symbolism is applied to God and His children, it represents holiness, righteousness, and success in the most important areas of life. This leads right into the matter of "*dressing up*" to be in God's presence.

It is very obvious that the fig leaves of Adam and Eve did not cut it. They were not *dressed up* enough to be in God's presence. The same is true of the guest at the wedding feast. The person was not *dressed up* for the wedding. The Laodiceans were clearly told to "*dress up*," and the Bride of Christ is clearly pictured as *being dressed up*, and in the right clothing. My emphasis here is on *dressing up*?dressing up toward the standard that God finds acceptable; not *down down*?those things that might be acceptable to a man, or to society, or to the world in general. We *dress up*! God's standard is higher than the world's in terms of morality. It may not be higher in terms of the quality of the material necessarily, but *morally* it will always be moving us up to meet the standards of God so that we do not fall short, and sin.

You might recall that when Moses and Joshua were in the presence of God (about forty years of time difference between the one and the other; first Moses, and then Joshua), they were told to take off their dirty shoes. It was not appropriate. It was not fitting. It was not right for them to be in the presence of God, walking on the same ground as He walked on with their dirty-soled shoes that they were wearing. Now what kind of an application does this have for us? Of course always there is the spiritual. It is the *unseen* part of this whole discussion. But even though it is *unseen*, it is *the* most important part. But like I said, the outside should reflect the inside.

We are going to go back to Genesis 35:1. The context here is Jacob fleeing from Laban, returning to his homeland. He has just had the encounter with his brother Esau, and God took him through that.

Genesis 35:1-2 And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother. [This was twenty-some years before this that he fled.] Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and *be clean*, and *change your garments*.

When Jacob made that altar and began to make the offering, they were going to be in the presence of God. "Clean yourself up, and change your clothes."

Let us read Exodus 19:9-11. Here the circumstance is they are at Mount Sinai, and God is addressing Moses, telling him to make an announcement to the people to get prepared, because He was going to be before them.

Exodus 19:9-11 And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the

LORD. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them *wash their clothes*. And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.

Genesis 35 and Exodus 19 are two examples of people *dressing up* in preparation for being in God's presence. In the first, Jacob voluntarily prepares, clearly following an already-established custom. In the second, God *commands* it. *Dressing up* to be in God's presence is a matter of respect, and God expects it. You can tell that especially from Exodus 19. It is a matter of respecting His holiness, and honoring the dignity of His office as Creator and Ruler.

The bathing of one's self and the changing of clothing symbolize that the internal cleansing of the heart is either already done or it is in progress. Cleansing, dressing up, in short symbolize the process of justification and sanctification. If you thought the day of symbolism and ceremony is over, you are wrong! It did not end with the Old Covenant, but it continues right on through, and we are to acknowledge it.

You can even attach this same principle that we are dealing with here to the matter of eating matzos (unleavened bread) during the Days of Unleavened Bread. It *pictures* something to us. It *teaches* something to us. And though they are not the biggest thing in the world in terms of our spirituality, it is awfully good to go through what God shows us here.

We are going to go now to Ezekiel as we continue to draw things out here. I think you understand enough about the background. God is giving us a word-picture here, and He is portraying Israel, first as a young girl and He is meeting with her, cleansing her, and entering into a marriage with her, and then Him fulfilling the role of a husband to her.

Ezekiel 16:8-9 Now when I passed by you, and looked upon you, behold, your time was the time of love, and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yes, I swore unto you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine. [He married her.] Then washed I you with water. [Now we are beginning to see the process of sanctification. Paul wrote, "We are washed with the water by the word."] Yes, I thoroughly washed away your blood from you, and I anointed you with oil.

In the next verses let us notice the way He dresses her. He is showing us in general terminology certain things regarding clothing.

Ezekiel 16:10-16 I clothed you also with embroidered work, and shod you with badgers' skin, and I girded you about with fine linen, and I covered you with silk. I decked you also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon your hands, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel on your forehead, and earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. Thus were you decked with gold and silver; and your

raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and embroidered work; you did eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and you were exceeding beautiful, and you did prosper into a kingdom. And your renown went forth among the heathen for your beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon you, says the Lord GOD. But you did trust in your own beauty, and played the harlot because of your renown, and poured out your fornications on every one that passed by; his it was. And of your garments you did take, and decked your high places with different colours, and played the harlot thereupon: the like things shall not come, neither shall it be so.

Verse 16, where it says, "decked your high places with different colors" is an interesting one to consider, because if you think of this in terms of a woman, where would her high places be? Her high places would be her face and her hair. What did she do? She colored her face and her hair, which is not a good indication here regarding cosmetics.

Ezekiel 26:17-19 You have also taken your fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made to yourself images of men, and did commit whoredom with them. And took your embroidered garments, and covered them: and you have set my oil and my incense before them. My meat also which I gave you, fine flour, and oil, and honey, wherewith I fed you, you have even set it before them for a sweet savour: and thus it was, says the Lord GOD.

When Israel became God's by entering into a marriage covenant with Him, God then performed one of the responsibilities of a husband by providing her with the good things of life. Fine clothing and jewelry with which to attire and adorn herself were among those things. One of the important things here is that God says He *directly* provided them. God clearly dressed her *up*.

When compared to other scriptures, this shows that there is a balance required of us in their use in terms of attire and adornment. Israel obviously abused this privilege by "going over the edge," as we might say today. The clothing and the other adornments were used by Israel in a salacious and seductive way of the world to attract attention to herself in the same general manner as a harlot, and so her attire, rather than being the attire of a beautiful and submissive wife, honoring the Almighty, was altered and used as the attire of a harlot, selling herself to the nations. It is very interesting, because this can be compared to Isaiah 47, and there is a direct parallel between Israel and Babylon, both in heart and in conduct.

Let us go back now to Isaiah once again. In the first 15 verses of Isaiah 3, He takes the men to task. It does not mention much about clothing there, but in verse 16 He begins talking about the women.

Isaiah 3:16-24 Moreover the LORD said, 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 [uncover] 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 a well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty.

I am going to read that to you from the *Living Bible*, and maybe it will be more understandable because they have updated the terms.

The Living Bible translation of Isaiah 3:16-24:

Isaiah 3:16-24 Next He will judge the haughty Jewish women, who mince along, noses in the air, tinkling bracelets on their ankles, with wanton eyes that rove among the crowds, to catch the glances of men. The Lord will send a plague of scabs to ornament their heads. He will expose their nakedness for all to see! No longer shall they tinkle with self-assurance as they walk, for the Lord will strip away the artful beauty, and their ornaments, their necklaces and bracelets, and veils of shimmering gauze. Gone shall be the scarves and ankle chains, headbands, earrings, and perfumes, their rings and jewels and party clothes and negligées, and capes and ornate combs and purses; their mirrors, lovely lingerie, beautiful dresses and veils. Instead of a sweet smelling perfume, they will stink. For sashes they will use ropes. Their well-set hair will all fall out. They will wear sacks instead of robes.

This whole chapter shows what God is going to do to Israel's women, and why. Actually the whole chapter shows what God is going to do to Israel, because He takes the men to task very strongly as well in the first part. He specifically singles out the attitudes, conduct, manner of dress, and ornamentation of Israel's women. These all go together as a package. They reflect each other.

The book of Isaiah was written sometime between 740 and 700 BC If you ever thought that ancient women wore only dark robes, I think you had better dispel that thought, because this description reveals a far different reality, because the illustration is drawing upon what the women were wearing and doing. How could God resolve to alter these things if they were not

wearing and doing them? He mentions 21 items of clothing, jewelry, hair dressing, perfume, and even appliances, like a mirror, used to make her fashionable to her *peers* rather than to God. What was in her heart was the acknowledgement of beauty from her peers.

The sum of His anger points to the undeniable fact that her outward adornment reflects the arrogance, haughtiness, pride, and aggressive seductiveness of their self-centered hearts. God is clearly showing that the way women dress is a force to be reckoned with in the making or breaking of a nation.

This might be a little aside, but I think it is interesting. Did you notice that He mentioned *women's women's mincing steps*? A number of years ago I read an article on women's clothing fashions that at one point addressed an interesting subject. It reported the results of a survey of clothing fashion designers that asked, among other things, "What item of clothing has contributed the most toward making a woman more seductive?" In the opinion of the designers, the winner, in a landslide, was the *high-heeled* shoe. This is because of the effect that they have in drawing attention to seductive areas of the woman's body, especially as she walks.

High heel shoes reform the curvature of the calf of the leg and ensure that the hips and breasts will be thrust out to some degree, because the heels throw the natural stance of the body out of alignment. They also cause the hips to sway more extensively, and the breasts to bounce, because the woman walks *sharder* as she compensates for the imbalance that the heels create. The designers know what they are doing! The designers are doing those things deliberately.

Exodus 28:1-3 And take you unto you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons. And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother for glory and for beauty. And you shall speak unto all that are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office.

I want you to notice that Aaron cannot do the ministering without the clothes. Just think about what they symbolize.

Exodus 28:4-6 And these are the garments which they shall make; a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and an embroidered coat, a mitre, and a girdle: and they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. [He needed the garments to do the ministering. That is very clear.] And they shall take gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen. And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen, with cunning work.

All of this was taking place in the preparations for making the place to worship God?the

Tabernacle?and now they have progressed to the place where He is giving directions for the priesthood and the clothing they are to wear so that they can serve God *at* the Tabernacle. The instructions for the clothing do not end here. They go on and on and on, and we are going to jump all the way to verse 39.

Exodus 28:39 And you shall embroider the coat of fine linen, and you shall make the mitre of fine linen, and you shall make the girdle of needlework.

Incidentally, this is the end of the instructions for making the clothing as far as Aaron is concerned. Verse 40 now tells about the garments to be made for Aaron's *sons*.

Exodus 28:40-43 And for Aaron's sons you shall make coats, and you shall make for them girdles, and bonnets shall you make for them, for glory and for beauty. And you shall put them upon Aaron your brother, and his sons with him; and shall anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office. And you shall make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach. And they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in unto the tabernacle of the congregation, or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy place; that they bear not iniquity, and die: it shall be a statute forever unto him and his seed after him.

You can see very clearly that for them to be in God's presence they have to dress *up* to this standard. The description begins with Aaron and the high priest's garments. It is good to remember that Aaron was a type of Jesus Christ, our High Priest, and He is represented in the stunningly beautiful clothing in which each piece and color represent some attribute of His office and His character.

We skipped most of it, but in verses 40 through 43 it then addresses Aaron's sons. Under the symbolism, and under the New Covenant, *we* are Aaron's sons. This is *our* clothing being described. We are priests, are we not? We are a kingdom of priests. God is forming us. These clothes for Aaron's sons do not possess the stunning beauty of the High Priest, but neither do we have the office, attributes, nor the character of Christ. It is nonetheless beautifully made, and the Jews in their commentaries insist that the ordinary priests' clothing *was stunningly white!* It is interesting that in Revelation 19 the church is dressed in white?in white linen.

The references to both the high priest's and the normal priests' garments contain the description for *glory* and *honor*. Modern translations are likely to render those words "for dignity and magnificence," or "for dignity and grandeur." One says, "To lend dignity to his work." But again, this goes all the way through the Bible. *Clothing reflects status*. This is very important. Clothing reflects *WHO WE ARE* and where we stand in relation to God. God is using clothing to set His people off, to set them apart, to sanctify them. Even as the Sabbath sanctifies us and sets us apart, so does clothing.

It is also interesting to note that as one comes closer to God, (that is, first of all, removed from just one of humanity to a priest, to a *high* priest), the clothing becomes more obvio