

Biblical Dress Code 7-16-17

Back during the presidential campaign there was an editorial written by a prominent pastor who essentially said that so many sincere Christians disagree on political issues that we really shouldn't think that God has stated positions on matters like abortion, marriage, war and economics. What this pastor said was not horrible in itself but the underlining message was that we can't really know what God thinks because sincere Christians hold varying views. That sincere Christians do hold diverse positions I must agree. But I would assert that some of these sincere Christians might best be described as ignorant Christians. Just because people don't know what God says doesn't mean God didn't say it. In truth, God does have some things to say about politics and a whole lot of other matters about which many sincere Christians are uninformed. II Timothy 3:17 says the *Scriptures were given that the man of God might be equipped for every good work*. Every life category is to be brought under the Lordship of Jesus and the instruction of His word so that we can find principles for every decision - principles I say, not necessarily specific instructions, but principles are given that address every compartment of life. So, today, believe it or not, we are going to examine Biblical principles for how a Christian is to dress. Call it a Biblical dress code. To organize our thoughts, I offer to you five helpful principles and two important attitudes. The five principles will each be stated in the negative forms, as things to avoid. And for our text this morning we have two short passages. I Peter 3:**3-4** (ESV) *Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious*. I Timothy 2:**9-10** *Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, 10 but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness*.

The first principle to note is that you are not dress to show off your body. The timing of this message, by the way, is quite intentional. The matter of dressing to show off your body is a bigger problem during the warmer months of the year when the days get longer and the shorts get shorter. It can be a difficult time for Christian males who want to maintain mental purity. So, this first principle is for both sexes, but it speaks especially to the ladies.

Someone said, "I remember when women who had nothing to wear stayed home." Now it seems that some intentionally put themselves on display. The women and young ladies of North

Park Church have, in my experience, been exemplary in this matter – for the most part. Still, to my Christian sisters I appeal to you on behalf of your brothers that you be careful not to put a stumbling block before us. A stumbling block, as Jesus uses the term, is something that presents to others an occasion or temptation to sin. And that is exactly what some do when they go about in clothing that highlights or draws attention to your alluring femininity. Wearing revealing or teasing clothing is not in and of itself sinful. But, when it is done in the context of men who want to be pure, it becomes inconsiderate and unwise. It does tempt men to lust. It does. And you can just shrug it off and say, *that's their problem* or you can express love by removing any hindrances to purity.

It is clear enough that some women, even many women, wear what they do or what they don't with the conscious intention of exciting male sexual interest. Plenty of men do the same thing. And there is nothing wrong with that - as long as the only person you are exciting is the one who has rights to your body. This means that how you dress in the bedroom and how you dress in the classroom are two entirely different things. Now, some of you ladies know exactly what you are doing in your dress, but others of you may not be aware. The problem of sexual lust, of being stimulated through the visual, is something you likely don't understand or appreciate. I urge you to please try. Ladies, men are wired differently than you. That is why pornography is largely a male enterprise. And that is why God has directed women, particularly, to the practice of modesty. Is that word *modesty* even used and understood anymore? Do our teenagers know what it is? It basically means that you don't go around showcasing your goods. Paul wrote: *I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly*. There is an awful lot of immodesty out there and sometimes - it is right here. We see it among Christians too. So men and ladies, be careful what you wear to the mall and the pool and the party. Make sure you aren't leading others to sin and that you are not out to advertise your own anatomy.

Some girls may have been taught by their peers or by the media that they have to dress immodestly in order to attract guys. I won't deny that some men are attracted to provocative women, but not the kind of man you want to attract, if you are a Christian lady. The kind of bait you use depends on the kind of fish you want to catch. And I'll tell you, there is a difference between the type of girl some men want to spend Friday night with and the type of girl with whom they want to build a life or a family. The principle for your dress is not to wear too little. It is further that you should not draw attention to yourself by how you dress. That should be true especially in the assembly of worshippers for we come together to pay our greatest attention to God.

The second principle for biblical dress is that you are not to dress in such a way as to draw attention to your clothes. Now there is a difference here. Some pick their clothes to draw attention to other things. Some pick their clothes to draw attention to the clothes. The principle again is not to draw undue attention to yourself or your clothes. This means to stay clear of wearing gaudy or extravagant clothing. **2** *I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments.* It says don't do it. Now some of you may be concerned about the braided hair line. Does that mean you should not fix your hair in braids or tails? I don't believe so. William Hendriksen writes that the braids of which the apostle speaks were made to be dazzling and actually sparkled. He writes, *“The braids were fastened by jeweled tortoise-shell combs, or by pins of ivory or silver. Or the pins were of bronze with jeweled heads, the more varied and expensive the better. The pin-heads often consisted of miniature images. Braids in those days represented fortunes. They were articles of luxury. The Christian woman is warned not to indulge in such extravagance.”*

The third principle for biblical dress is that you not dress expensively. What did our text say? "Not with gold or pearls or costly garments." Why not? Why is God down on costly garments? Two reasons: (1) You don't want to dazzle people and draw attention to your fancy clothes. We've already seen that. And expensive clothes usually are purchased for that very reason. In fact, I'm persuaded that very expensive clothes are typically purchased not because they look nicer but because they let others know that the wearer has money. Thorstein Veblen, in his 1899 volume, "The Theory of the Leisure Class" argues that people who make a surplus of money do not use it to expand their lives, to live more wisely or to help others but they use their surplus to impress other people that they have a surplus. I'm glad there are exceptions to that. I was asked by one of our singles once what she should do with all her excess money. She had a problem. She was making \$34,000 and only needed \$20,000 to live and she wanted advice on what to do with the other 14. What a refreshing question! That, not showy dress, is the Christian way.

(2) The second reason you are not to dress expensively is that your money could be used for better purposes. That is not to say that money isn't well spent to provide decent clothes. But, there is a huge difference between providing decent clothes and what many American families are doing. If you want to get your financial house in order look closely at your clothing budget. Most of us could go five years without a stitch of new clothes except for shoes. And, when it comes time to buy – my goodness, there are some great deals to be found for those who will look. And besides, God says

you ladies need to adorn yourself how? Not with gold or pearls or costly garments but with good works which adornment is fitting for a woman of God.

The fifth principle for biblical dress is that you should not dress strangely. Now "strange" means different things at different places at different times. Accepted dress in Africa is different from accepted dress in Chicago. People in South Florida are more casual than people in New York. What is acceptable at a baseball game is different from what is acceptable at a wedding. The applications will differ but the principle is not to dress so that you stand out as an oddball. Look at I Corinthians 9. This passage gives us the Jew to Jew, Greek to Greek principle. It is more familiarly known as the principle which says, "When in Rome do as the Romans do except when the Romans sin." **19-22** (NLT) *Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. 20 When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. 21 When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. 22 When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some.* What is he saying here? For one he says that he is free from men. That is, he is not bound to do what men want out of some kind of moral necessity. And there is no law which prevents you from dressing however you like, but there is another principle which is founded on love. He says that, in his ministry, he seeks to be like his audience in some ways so that he might more effectively communicate the gospel. Is there a limit to this? Certainly. You don't become an addict so you can minister to addicts. That should be obvious, but Paul is saying that he is prepared to abide by different customs in different places to win acceptance and a hearing. If I am ministering to upper-middle class professionals then I may wear a coat and tie. If I am ministering to inner-city poor I'll wear jeans and a pull-over. You see the point? This has to be done within the boundaries of the previous three points but we should make some effort to do it.

In addition, there are certain types of strange dress specifically forbidden by Scripture. Deuteronomy 22:5 *A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.* Wow, there is a great deal of relevant Biblical world-view behind that verse. Fifty years ago, some church groups

applied this verse by telling women they can't wear pants. But that is missing the point of this verse. This commandment is designed to oppose transvestitism and it is also here to protect the distinctiveness of masculinity and femininity. Because God created us male and female He desires that we not try to mask those differences. This is opposed to unisexism and so much of what is happening in our culture today. God wants even your clothing to be distinctly male or female according to his design, not your shifting whims. What is distinctly male or female may change with the culture. 100 years ago, wearing pants may indeed have violated this principle, but no more. What it does mean is that men shouldn't wear anything that buttons or zips in the back, and I, for one, am thankful for that.

Our fifth principle for Biblical dressing is to not dress foolishly. Don't dress foolishly. That is a very vague way of putting this. Let me explain as we look at I Samuel 16:7 the famous words of God to Samuel "*For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart.*" The major point of that verse is that what counts most about a person is not anything visible. It is, as I Peter 3 terms it, *the hidden person of the heart*. That is what matters to God, yes? Yes. That is the point of the verse. However, in making that point God also presents what is a fact of life in human society. Men look at what? The appearance. And when men look at the appearance they are going to make certain judgments about what they see aren't they? If your car breaks down on the highway late at night and someone pulls up behind you and stops, when that person gets out of the car will it make a difference to your heart-rate how that person is dressed? You know it would. Some fella may be the nicest man in town but the way he dresses could make you nervous, right? In every society, there are certain outward expressions of an inward rebellion. When I was a kid the hippy scene of the 60s was a rebellion against establishment values and establishment authority and the uniform was long-hair for guys, flared jeans, and tie-dye t-shirt. The outfit spoke volumes about what was on the inside. It usually does, and people rightfully make those connections. Parents have to be wise not to draw battlelines with their teens over the insignificant, but tattoos, clothing and piercings are not necessarily insignificant. They may reveal something churning in the heart of a young person that needs to be honestly addressed by the parents and the teen. You can see snapshots of ten teenagers and by their appearance, the way they wear their hair, their dress, their piercings, you can make a generally accurate guess of who is the dropout or the pot-smoker or the one with a basic anti-authoritarian attitude. Will it make a difference when it comes time to hire someone for a job? You bet it will. The appearance does matter. You will never

get so spiritual that it doesn't and even if you do the folks around you won't. How you dress and how you wear your hair communicates, and it is foolish to pretend otherwise. When you watch footage on the news from murder trials and rape trials what does the accused person normally look like? Sometimes they try to make the guy look insane because that's their plea but most often the accused is sitting politely in the courtroom, well-groomed and wearing a coat and tie. Why? Do you think that's the way the average drug- addict murderer looks? No, and that is precisely why his attorney told him to change his appearance. I don't have a verse that says to dress nicely and get a haircut but if you want a job you ought to do it because man looks on the outward appearance. You may not like it but that's the way it is. The Christian does not live to be a man-pleaser but he had best not ignore the messages sent by way he dresses and grooms.

So, those are our five principles for biblical dressing. Now we will wrap up by discussing two attitudes we all need to have. First, maintain a proper emphasis for yourself. That is you need to care most about the things for which God cares most. Both of our initial texts show us the same thing. I Timothy 2:10 says to adorn yourself with good works. I Peter 3:**4** *Let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.* Both times where we find brief instructions on how to dress the Lord wraps up by reminding us of where our emphasis should lie. I Peter 5:**5** says to clothe yourselves with humility. Colossian 3:**12** (NIV) *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* And most importantly of all, we read that Christians are to be clothed, covered, adorned with the person of Christ Himself. Galatians 3:**27** *For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* Then in Romans 13 we are told **14a** (NIV) *Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.* There is this gospel image of us as naked, filthy, unacceptable sinners, who have been covered, clothed, beautified by the pure and perfect garments of our Savior's righteousness, which saving righteousness is given to all who trust in Christ. I have to believe that if we understand how magnificently our souls are dressed in the righteousness of our Savior, that our concerns about our outer clothing will naturally take a back seat. As you can see, what counts far more than outer beauty is the matter of the spirit and of the heart. And living in a culture like ours that is so given over to appearance and externalities this has to be hit hard. God looks on the heart. So, a right emphasis for all of us is to care more about the inner man than the outer man. Only one of those will last forever, right? It is possible to give too little care and thought

to the body and the appearance but it is far more common to care too little about the soul. That is why, in eight years here I've preached many, many sermons about the heart and only this one on how to dress. You get your heart right and your dress wrong then you may have a problem for a while. But you get your dress right and your heart wrong and you are lost for much longer than a while.

Some application - when you get ready to come here and worship do you spend time getting your heart right or are you too caught up in dressing the body? What counts the most? Do you spend a lot of time shopping and thinking about what you will wear and how you will look? Jesus said, "Why are you anxious about clothing? Seek first the kingdom of God." We are not to find our worth in the clothing that adorns our body but in the righteous robes of Jesus Christ which make us lovely in God's eyes. If you have problems here - some of us men, some of you ladies, don't ignore it. You confess your skewed values to God. I would suggest every woman in here memorize Proverbs 31:30. No, make it every woman and every man. **30** *Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.* So, keep the emphasis of your life where it belongs.

The second important attitude to maintain is tolerance for others. Have you ever gone somewhere only to discover that your attire is out of sync with the crowd? You dress up and everyone else is casual or vice versa and you really feel dumb. That's a pressure we shouldn't feel in the church. And certainly, not one we should lay on others. You know kids attending school can feel an enormous amount of pressure to dress acceptably. They think you have to have the right shoes or the right animal on your shirt - and that's a pitiful thing to put on our kids. Recognizing how that works a lot of private Christian schools, and even a few public ones, have decided to require uniforms. Everybody has to wear the same thing. Think how that can simplify life. It eliminates a lot of barriers that dress can throw up between kids. How many family fights would be prevented by such a policy? "*You aren't going to school dressed like that!*" Has that ever been heard in your home? "*But Dad, its our uniform.*" "Oh! well okay then." Uniforms could help. But here is my point - don't be critical in some condemning way of how your brother or sister dresses. Some want to absolutize certain rules of dress and they end up teaching as the commandments of God what are really the doctrines of men.

Now, in every church we are to be unified but that does not mean uniform. We have things common to us that make us very much alike and things different. Some of you like to dress more

formally to church, others more casually but we all must come dressed in the righteous robes of Jesus. The best situation is what I think we have: diversity according to personal taste within the bounds of God's word and the leading of love. And in the great worship service that awaits us in glory we will all be looking ever so fine --- to the glory of God.

If you have any questions about this subject I'm sure Taylor or Ben will be glad to answer them. Let's stand for prayer....In My Life Lord