

Clothed for Worship
October 28, 2018

When I was in elementary school, no one talked about what you could or could not wear to school. That changed the year I started Junior High School. The style for boys were these really tight pants that stopped around the ankle. And the length of dresses and skirts for girls had crept up above the knee.

So a new dress code was passed in our school. Boy's pants had to come down to within an inch of the top of the back of their shoes. And if a girl's dress appeared to be too short, she would have to get down on her knees on the floor. A teacher would then measure between the floor and the bottom of her dress, which could be no more than two inches off the floor.

The next year the clothing styles went in a drastically different direction and there was no longer any talk of a dress code. Attire for both boys and girls became longer and baggier and pretty much limited to yellow, navy blue, or khaki. It was the block look. Some of you may remember that style.

Two years later I moved up to high school. I don't recall any talk of a dress code except that girls had to wear dresses. They could only wear slacks when we had a home football game. They could wear slacks on those days because it was so cold sitting out in the stadium watching the game. Even girls who did not attend the game could wear slacks.

Of course to many this seemed rather arbitrary. If girls could wear slacks on one day, why not every day? So the girls plotted to all wear slacks on a particular non-football-game day, figuring the school would not suspend them all. And they were right. After that everyone wore pretty much whatever they wanted.

There was a time when most men dressed in a suit to attend a public Christian worship service in Europe and America. I name those places because Christians in the middle and far east did not wear suits, ever, until modern days when influenced by the western world of missionaries, businessmen, lawyers, and politicians.

If you search the new testament looking for what to wear to public Christian worship, you won't find anything. Shoes were not invented yet. Everyone wore sandals if they wore anything on their feet. Pants did not exist then even for men. There WERE differences in dress between men and women, but we don't know a lot about those differences.

Jesus never wore a suit for worship. The apostles never wore a suit for worship. Suits and ties had not been invented yet.

Neckties originated from the cravat which itself originated about 400 years ago. Cravats initially served the purpose of protecting your shirt while eating. If you spilled something on it, you could easily remove it after dining and still present yourself in a clean shirt. The cravat eventually morphed into the fashion necktie.

I don't mind wearing a coat and tie on occasion. I wore one yesterday. But cultural expectations on dress are changing. These days many men no longer own a suit. So you see less suits at funerals and weddings than you did thirty years ago.

Dress at public Christian worship services has also changed in most churches around the world. My first Sunday at this church, some 33 years ago, I wore a coat and tie on Sunday morning and again on Sunday night. One of the deacons that first night told me I did not need to wear a suit coat on Sunday evening. So I quit doing so. Over the years we have become even more casual, not only on Sunday evenings, but also on Sunday mornings.

So you might be wondering about the title of today's message. Why talk about clothes if the Bible doesn't have anything to say about how to dress for worship? Well, it does have something, just not what to wear in the form of clothes. Worship is only a little about the outside. Mostly it is about the inside. So let's start there. How do you need to dress on the inside to approach God in worship? To learn this we need to look at Romans 1.

There are certain foundational passages in the Bible that lay the groundwork of everything else in the Bible. One of these foundational passages is in Romans 1.

Romans 1:18-21 (NIV) The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

The word godly, from which we get the word godlessness, does not mean to be like God. Instead, it means to be focused on learning and living God's will. Synonyms include the words piety and devotion.

This passage reveals that mankind, as a whole, for the most part, has rebelled against the basic knowledge of the existence of God. God reveals His existence and power through the creation. We call this natural revelation. Looking at nature, the created world, we should draw two conclusions. First, we should conclude that there is a creator, a deity, a divine being who thought it all up and made it. And secondly, we should conclude that this divine being is extremely powerful.

So, based on this natural revelation by God to us, we should dress for worship as follows:

Approach God acknowledging Him as our powerful creator.

God expects us to respond to Him in a personal way. So the first inside part of approaching God in worship is to admit that He exists, that there is a deity in charge of the universe. Acknowledge that He made us. Acknowledge that He did so for His own purposes. For His own purposes He gave us life.

Even a man who grew up in the wilds of the Amazon jungle, who knew nothing of the rest of the world can look at the natural world and conclude that there must be a powerful creator who made it. And in that knowledge, that man can seek to know his creator. He can praise the creator.

As a part of this acknowledgment of God we should dress in humility.

In the light of creation, we are pretty small. Even if we are far superior to the animals and fishes, we are pretty ignorant and powerless compared to God. James wrote...

**James 4:6, 10 (NIV) "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ...
Humble yourselves before the Lord...**

Humble yourself before His greatness. He is the one, true, living God, the creator and sustainer of the universe. He is all knowing, all wise, and all-powerful. He is present in every part of his universe and outside of it all at the same time. There is nowhere that God is not present. There is nothing done that God does not see. There is nothing said that God does not hear. There is nothing thought that God does not know. There is nothing that falls beyond his view, his power, his sovereignty, or outside of his plan.

If you ever get to go to the white house to meet the president, any president, you will be expected to dress in clean clothes. You will be expected to dress modestly. You will be expected to be polite to everyone, most especially the president. You are to address him as Mr. President. If he is standing, you are to stand. If he sits, you may sit, if invited to do so. The president is a very important person. In fact he is the most important person in our country. And you should acknowledge that fact in your words and behavior when in his presence.

Well God is a million times more important than any president, any prime minister, any king. And you don't just approach him like he is your buddy who lives down the street. You approach God in humility.

The man, Job, thought a lot of himself and in his suffering, didn't think much of God. When confronted Job, he changed his opinion of himself saying...

Job 40:4 (NIV) "I am unworthy--how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth.

(Other translations read: I am nothing, I am vile, I am of small account, I am of little importance, I am insignificant.)

When we approach the all-powerful creator of the universe, we must come with that attitude. He is everything and we are nothing. He knows everything and we know so little. Our knowledge of the world, even in this day is so small. Our knowledge of the human body, of the ocean depths, of the stars is still so small compared to all there is to know of these things.

Our knowledge is small and our power is small. We cannot control the earth, the moon, or any of the planets. We cannot control the wind or the waves, the rain or the snow. Wouldn't it be great if we could control the rain? We could have it rain on schedule, say, Sunday nights after 10 p.m. And it would not rain the rest of the week. No ballgames or picnics would ever get rained out.

But we do not have such power. Only God does. He has more power than all the power in the universe. He has more control over your life than you do. So when we approach him in worship here on Sunday morning, at home, or somewhere else, we must do so humbly, in recognition of the differences between us and God. He is holy, unlike us.

As we look once again at the Romans passage we see what else is basic to worshipping our creator.

Approach God dressed in gratitude.

Romans 1:21 (NIV) For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him,

Part of our response to the natural revelation is gratitude. We should thank God for life. He made us. He gave us life. He gives us what sustains life. We should acknowledge Him with praise and thank Him for life.

We do not do either of these enough. How many days in your life did you fail to even think about God, much less thank Him? How many days in the last year did you fail to acknowledge the existence of God? Even if you did not worship Him, you could have said hello. You could have acknowledged His existence. You could have thanked Him for giving you life. Even if you ignored the rest of your blessings, though you should not, you should thank Him for your existence. How many days did you fail to thank him for your life?

Each day you failed to acknowledge Him and each day you failed to thank Him for your life is a sin. This is the chief cause of the wrath of God. By our failure to acknowledge and thank Him we hide the truth of Him from ourselves and our children. And the world gets progressively worse.

So far we have just looked at the inside. This next one is also an inside thing, though there are outward, in-the-world aspects to be lived out.

Approach God dressed in obedience.

John 14:15 (NIV) If you love me, you will obey what I command.

God told the prophet Samuel that man looks at a person's outside, but God looks at a person's heart. Does your heart, and by extension, your behavior of obedience to God, reveal true worship or just dressed up pretend worship?

Finally, if you really want some help with dressing for public, Christian worship, then here it is, In addition to the previous, I recommend that you...

Come to church washed, dressed modestly, in clean clothes.

The style isn't important as long as you are modestly dressed and clean. Your clothes don't have to be new, expensive, or even the most costly clothes you own. God looks much at your heart and not much at your clothes. But dress modestly and clean for the rest of us.

Invitation

What is the state of your heart towards God? Are you ready to admit your sin against Him? Are you ready to admit you need a savior? Are you ready to acknowledge Jesus as the savior you need? Are you ready to submit your life to Him, to His control? Then pray yourself into the hands of Jesus this morning. Receive Him as your risen-from-the-dead savior and Lord.