

The Scriptures Decree Modesty in Dress

In ancient times, as throughout many countries today, a person's social rank could be determined by his dress. Similarly, dress is a significant measurement of Christian conduct and practice. Christians can often be identified as such by their outward appearance.

Our people predicate their practices and beliefs upon the Bible. In baptism, we practice immersion in the name of Jesus as the apostles did. We teach and preach the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a definite experience evidenced by speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance.

Since we adhere as carefully and closely to the Scriptures as possible in matters pertaining to salvation, we also measure the standards of Christian practicalities such as clothing, by the same rule.

New Testament Teaching for Women

The New Testament makes several specific statements pertaining to women's dress in the epistles of Paul and Peter.

"I will that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting. 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; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Timothy 2:8-10).

"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands" (1 Peter 3:1-5).

Paul admonished women to dress according to certain standards and listed them in this order: modesty, inexpensive and nonornamental attire, and clothing that becomes godliness. To be modest means to be decent and respectful. The apostolic Christian woman seeks to emulate all the fine virtues of Christian womanhood, so she carefully and prayerfully selects her attire in order not to unduly expose her body to the stares of the public. She is not so old-fashioned as to look like a monstrosity, but she is deliberately methodical in choosing clothing that will dignify her womanhood without provoking the stares of the opposite sex.

She has dedicated herself to the cause of Christianity. This manner of dedication avoids expensive, extravagant clothing and superfluous, ornamental jewelry, permitting only the

functional use of a wristwatch and a wedding band to designate her wedlock. The great needs of Christian evangelism and charitable assistance to the poor demand that she deny herself the exorbitant tastes of expensive fads so that she might practice the Christian art of concern for others. In this manner, she professes a godliness that stems from a heartfelt desire for virtuous, holy living.

Her hair style is again predicated upon the Word of God, which teaches her to let her hair grow uncut: "Is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering" (I Corinthians 11:13-15).

Against this picture of scriptural womanhood, we have the worldly female of today who tries by every conceivable means, it seems, to flirt with the hazards of indecency. Costumes and apparel that are inclined toward nudity are sought after intensely. The results are demonstrated in a wanton display of seminude parades on our public streets. Many authorities agree that this concentration on exposure of the body has contributed greatly to the serious problems of immorality that threaten the basic foundations of our homes and families. It has also been a cause in inviting serious sexual atrocities.

The worldly woman also makes a hobby of fashion crazes and style shows. She sets up a contest with her neighbors as to who owns the most expensive jewelry, who wears the latest clothes, and who has traveled the farthest to buy the latest creation. It makes for an interesting discussion over a cocktail, but it does not alleviate the serious problems and needs of a reeling world, which Christians are called upon to address with a Christ-like zeal to help desperate souls, both by their means and their consecration.

Distinction Between Male and Female

Moreover, the Scriptures teach a great difference between femininity and masculinity as to dress. "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).

The desire to emulate men in dress has seriously affected the fine and noble characteristics of womanhood. Often it takes a second glance to determine the sex of a woman today, due to the distorted and strange garb she wears and the close proximity of her attire to that of a man. The Scriptures call this practice an abomination unto God, or something God hates.

Perhaps some will say this standard has changed due to the inception of the age of grace introduced by Jesus Christ. But this verse deals with moral law and with the nature of God, which never change, not with a ceremonial ritual fulfilled by Christ. Moreover, when the Apostle Peter wished to instruct Christian women about proper conduct, he used Sarah, the wife of Abraham, as his example (I Peter 3:5). Thus, we are not out of order in this instance to use a verse of Scripture from the law. We rightfully go back over the years and learn a spiritual lesson that sharply rebukes the customs and practices of our day.

Scriptural Guidelines Summarized

Holy women of old concentrated on adorning their spiritual life by developing the character of the heart. This is the major concentration and beautification of the Christian woman. Thus, the Apostle Peter used the great dedication of women of another age to impress the women of the first century with the need for the ornament or adornment of a meek and quiet spirit.

By the same token, we are within reasonable and scriptural rights to insist that Christian women today heed the influential, sensible, and divinely inspired advice of the apostles.

Here are the biblical guidelines concerning Christian example in dress for women.

1. Modesty
2. Moderation in cost.
3. Inclination toward godliness (decency).
4. Avoidance of outward adornment.
5. Shamefacedness and sobriety.
6. Distinction between male and female.

Guidelines for Men

The New Testament does not provide instructions expressly for men's clothing. Apparently immodest dress was not as much of a problem for men in those days, even though it often is today. However, in many instances it may well be said, "What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

The trend to indecent exposure is even having an impression on the male sex today. Comfort seems to be the overall objective instead of a cautious, considerate thought for decorum and dignity. But comfort can be achieved without some of the ridiculous, outlandish costumes now being displayed on our busy avenues.

We can honestly proclaim that the basic principles of godly appearance that apply to Christian women should also apply to men; namely, modesty, moderation, decency, elimination of ornamentation and costly finery, and distinction between male and female in hair and dress.