

## WHAT SHALL WE WEAR?

by John Isaac Edwards

This question appears in the midst of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 6:25-34. What we wear is not a matter of indifference to God. In every dispensation, He has given instruction on this matter. Under the law of Moses, there were some specific dress decrees. It was said, *“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”* (Dt. 22:5). The Bible uses different terms to address what we wear: *“apparel”* (Judg. 17:10), *“attire”* (Prov. 7:10), *“clothing”* (Job 22:6), *“garments”* (Gen. 35:2), and *“raiment”* (Gen. 24:53). Here are some Bible principles to help us answer the question, **“What Shall We Wear?”**

**1) CLOTHING THAT COVERS OUR NAKEDNESS.** Genesis 2 reports of Adam and Eve in the marriage relationship: *“And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed”* (v. 25). After eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, *“... the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons”* (Gen. 3:7). The Biblical usage of *“aprons”* is that of girdle, loin-covering,

belt, loin-cloth. Evidently, the attempt of the man and woman to cover their nakedness was inadequate and insufficient.

*“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them”* (Gen. 3:21). Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon says of *“coats”*: *“a tunic...generally with sleeves, coming down to the knees...”* This shows that we may have something on and yet it not be enough to cover our nakedness. When altar-making instruction was given it was said, *“Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that they nakedness be not discovered thereon”* (Ex. 20:26). What we wear needs to cover our nakedness in all circumstances. Does my clothing cover my nakedness when I go up steps, when I sit, when I bend over, etc. *“...linen breeches...”* were to be made for Aaron’s sons *“...to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach”* (Ex. 28:42). The Bible upholds the principle that one’s nakedness is to be covered and that for one’s nakedness to be uncovered is for one’s shame to be seen (Is. 47:2-3; Rev. 3:18).

**2) GARMENTS SUITABLE FOR THE OCCASION.** Genesis 41 finds Pharaoh sending for Joseph in the prison. Verse 14 informs us

that Joseph *“...shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh.”*

Apparently, Joseph’s prison garb was not suitable for such an occasion as appearing before the ruler of Egypt. Likewise, after David and Bathsheba’s child died, *“David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped...”* (2 Sam. 12:20). Why did he wash, anoint himself and change his apparel before going into the Lord’s house? Did he deem his appearance unsuitable for such an occasion as worshiping the Lord? Remember the Lord’s teaching about a man which had not on a wedding garment (Mt. 22:11-14)? That teaching is possible because of the principle of wearing garments suitable for the occasion. We recognize this principle. What I wear painting would probably not be considered suitable garments for my wedding day.

**3) ATTIRE THAT DOES NOT SEND THE WRONG MESSAGE.** Whether we realize it or not, what we wear sends a message. Have you ever been in a department store and someone ask you for assistance, thinking you worked there because of how you were dressed? Your dress

sent a signal. The Gibeonites understood this in working wilily to obtain a league with Israel. They "...made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up; And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them..." (Josh. 9:4-5). What messages would a shepherd's garment (Jer. 43:12) or widow's garments (Gen. 38:14, 19) convey? Genesis 35:2 speaks of garments associated with idolatry. The Bible speaks of "...the attire of an harlot..." (Prov. 7:10). One of the means by which the woman of ill-repute seeks to seduce the simple youth is by her attire. Genesis 38 relates how Judah was deceived by Tamar. She "...put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a vail, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place..." (v. 14). "When Judah saw her, he thought her to be an harlot..." (v. 15). What do people think us to be, when they see us? Is the message we are sending consistent with godliness and holiness (1 Tim. 2:10; Titus 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:15-16)? What does our clothing communicate?

**4) APPAREL THAT IS MODEST.** Paul wrote, "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"* (1 Tim. 2:9). The word "modest" is used in the sense of well arranged; seemly. It's been said that the word "modest" in the Bible has more to do with wearing too much than it does wearing too little. So, if I have on a vest, a coat and an overcoat, am I immodest? This is the only place the word "modest" appears in the Bible and in this context the words "shamefacedness" and "sobriety" will not allow such a thought. "Shamefacedness" or shamefastness suggests a sense of shame; having regard to others; that which would always restrain a good man from an unworthy act. Have we become like those in the days of Jeremiah when it was said, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush..." (Jer. 6:15). "Sobriety" indicates sound judgment; that habitual inner self-government, with its constant rein on all the passions and desires, which would hinder the temptation to these from arising, or at all events from

arising in such strength as would overbear the checks and barriers which shaefastness opposed to it. This not only includes not wearing enough to cover our nakedness, but that which is form-fitting and accentuates parts of the body that would cause temptations to arise.

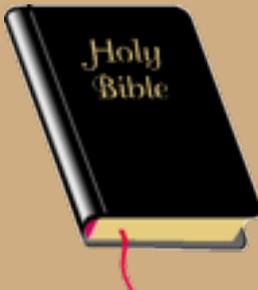
**5) ADORNING THAT DOES NOT NEGLECT THE HIDDEN MAN OF THE HEART.** There is more to us than what we see in the mirror. There is "the hidden man of the heart" (1 Pet. 3:4), also known as the "inward man" (2 Cor. 4:16) or the "inner man" (Eph. 3:16). As it is possible to so emphasize body-building of the outer man, this physical body, to the neglect of strengthening the inner man, we must put the proper emphasis on the hidden man of the heart in our adorning. Peter penned, "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" (1 Pet. 3:3-4). When we get the heart right, the outward adorning will follow suit!

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