

PERSONAL APPEARANCE IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S WORD

How do I look? How long and in what style should I wear my hair? What length dress? Heels? Does my purse match my outfit? Is this suit, dress, pair of shoes still in style?—and on and on!

Personal appearance has been a great concern to man throughout history. Why does the average person give so much attention to it? Does he do it “to be seen of men”? Or to please God?

Suppose we knew that for an entire day we would be seen by God and His holy angels only. Would this affect our appearance? How?

Does God care about man's appearance? Does He look on the outside or only on the heart? Does man's outward array have anything to do with his relationship to God? Or, to reverse the question, does a person's inward relationship to God affect his outward appearance?

Answers? Yes.

Someone has well said, “There is nothing on the outside but what something on the inside put it on.” Man's outward appearance most assuredly reveals a heart condition. And God has provided the remedy for man's “desperately wicked” heart. In addition to this, God has also spoken to this much-talked-about subject of man's outward appearance. “It is written down in a Book.”

One Bible scholar has pointed out that dress is mentioned over 1400 times in the Bible. Both the Old and New Testaments reflect God's will regarding man's personal appearance. And God's will is what we want to know—what we must know! For God is our Creator and will be our final Judge.

Therefore, let us give serious attention to God's dress principles and standards for man throughout the Scriptures. It will be noted that the New Testament principles, which we use mainly for the Christian's applications, are the same principles as found in the Old Testament. Thus we begin with the Old Testament as a proper foundation in approaching this study.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Sin and dress have the same birthday. With sin came the necessity of covering nakedness. Adam and Eve tried it. But what they designed was inadequate. *When God came on the scene, Adam still considered himself naked* (Gen. 3:7, 10). So, fallen man's design of clothes was not satisfying to himself when in God's presence, nor was it acceptable to God. God took issue with sinful man's first dress style and clothed Adam and Eve with coats of skins. Nakedness had to be covered.

IN THE WILDERNESS

Through Moses, God delivered to His people some specifics concerning dress. Among them is the one commanded in Numbers 15:37-41. A fringe with a blue ribbon was to be put on the edge of their garments. God designed it not as a fleeting fashion nor for a designated age group, but for all of them "throughout their generations."

The purposes and principle unfolded in this Scripture merit special attention. The conspicuous "extra" on their garments was:

1. For *them* to look at (not primarily as a witness to the ungodly).
2. To help *them* to remember all of God's commandments and do them.
3. To keep *them* from going their own way.
4. To keep *them* holy (set apart for God).
5. To help *them* to remember God. (The world's clothes make people forget God.)

God desires man's remembrance and obedience. Immediately preceding this Scripture, the stoning of the Sabbath-breaker gravely manifests the importance of remembering and keeping *all* of the Lord's commandments. God instituted for the Old Testament saints certain things for them to do and look at (i.e., the various feasts, distinctive attire) to help them to remember Him. Likewise, in the New Testament, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, and said, "This *do* in *remembrance* of me."

Recorded in Deuteronomy 22:5 is a further word from the Lord, commanding sex distinction in dress. Here God detests and abhors the practice of men and women wearing the same form of garments. Regardless of all the reasons for sex distinc-

tion in dress, this Scripture forthrightly declares that the man or woman who is guilty of such practice is an abomination to the Lord.

IN THE LAND OF JUDAH

About 700 years later the Lord pronounces judgment upon the women of Israel for their pride (Isaiah 3:16-26). They were manifesting this by the way they walked, by the look in their eyes, and by the way they adorned their bodies. *God most surely looks on the outside, for here He names 21 ornaments of pride.* A careful check on the original meanings of the things named reveals their showy construction and the purpose for their being worn, namely, to attract attention to themselves and their bodies. Worldly fashions and adornment do not grow out of humility.

In observing yet another Old Testament Scripture, it will be noted that God pronounces further punishment on His people who “are clothed with strange apparel” (Zephaniah 1:8).

To be clothed with “strange apparel” would indicate a forsaking of what God commanded (such as has been noted in Numbers 15:37-41; Deuteronomy 22:5), and an acceptance of sinful man’s designs. The sinfulness of such acceptance becomes more clear by observing with whom people who reject God’s standard are classed and punished—the idolators, those who have turned back from the Lord, etc. (verses 5-9).

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The example of Jesus deserves attention. The reference to the hem (Greek: fringe, tassel) of His garment in Matthew 9:20 and 14:36 verifies His obedience to Numbers 15:37-41. And in Revelation 1:13 John sees the Son of man “clothed with a garment down to the foot.” These Scriptures make clear His practice of at least two principles: 1. He adhered to a God-ordained uniform pattern; 2. His body was fully covered.

The man in the country of the Gadarenes (Luke 8:27, 35) strikingly portrays the difference in outward appearance resulting from a change of masters. When possessed with devils he wore no clothes; the same man, “out of whom the devils were departed,” was sitting at the feet of his new Master, clothed. A person’s relationship to the Lord *does* affect his outward appearance.

The first eleven chapters of Romans describe man’s sinful

condition, and how both Jew and Gentile can be saved, purified, and justified in the sight of God. But Romans 8:23 makes clear that man's *body* is not yet redeemed. So how shall an unredeemed body, housing a redeemed person, appear and be used?

Some answers to this question are found in Romans 12:1, 2. The Christian's body is to:

1. Be presented "acceptable unto God" (rather than to make a "hit" with society).
2. Be kept holy.
3. Be a very-much-alive sacrifice unto God.
4. Not be fashioned according to this age.

And this use and appearance of the Christian's body is a most "reasonable [rational, intelligent] service," though some seem to consider it unreasonable.

The word conformed (v. 2) literally means "fashioned," and is so translated in 1 Peter 1:14. According to an authority on New Testament Greek, every New Testament occurrence of this word has reference to the outside, never to the inner nature. Therefore the Christian's body, of which the Lord is speaking in verse 1, is not to be in "union with (this world [age]) by external appearance or fashion." Instead, the Christian is to be transformed (metamorphosed)—a radical and thorough inward conversion which is reflected outwardly.

Now, observe carefully! Why is the Christian's body not to be fashioned like this age? Why is he to be a transformed person, inside and out? *So that he "may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"* The Christian's clear-cut detachment from the world in appearance enriches his own life. It leads him to a fuller understanding of God's good and perfect will, and therefore will help him to keep the rest of God's commandments. Likewise, it will communicate to others a holy and most convincing testimony. For, is not the visible proof of the perfect will of God the world's most needed testimony!

How these two verses in Romans 12 ring harmoniously in principle and purpose with the aforementioned Numbers 15 Scripture! The application of the principle may vary. This is understandable. The child of God living near the equator, and the Christian Eskimo in the frigid zone would hardly use the same application of these principles. *But an application they must have!*

Continuing further in the New Testament, it will be noticed that the teachings regarding the Christian's outward appearance become more detailed. 1 Corinthians 11:6, 14, 15, speak to

the much-discussed subject of the hair. The godly woman is not to have her hair cut, neither *some* of it nor *all* of it (v. 6). Likewise, the man who is a follower of Christ (v. 1) is not to have his hair long (v. 14).

According to 1 Timothy 2:9, 10, the people professing godliness are to put on that which is modest. Bashfulness toward men and modesty toward God with awe and reverence—this is the meaning of “shamefacedness.” “Sobriety” defined in this context means self-control, discreetness, and soberness in outward appearance. Showy, ornamental hair dressing comes under condemnation. The wearing of gold, pearls and unnecessarily expensive clothing is likewise forbidden.

The authority with which Paul pens these lines should arrest attention. In the first part of verse 7 he states his credentials of confidence. He follows with a declaration that he is speaking the truth and nothing but the truth. And to further support this, Paul repeats that he is a teacher in faith and verity (truth). This solemnly expressed authority should cause the child of God to ponder prayerfully the importance of these detailed instructions relative to dress.

Another principle comes into focus from 1 Peter 1:14-16. Obedient children of God do not fashion themselves according to their former fleshly desires. They are holy (pure, godly, set apart for God’s glory and service) in *all* of life and behavior. Again, note the reinforcement of the Numbers 15 and Romans 12 principle and purpose, namely, that our manner of dress is closely connected with *all* of life in Christ.

1 Peter 3:1-5 answers some more questions regarding outward adorning and its purposes. Once more it is coupled with a total life of purity (v. 2). Putting on the unnecessary, whether it be for show, or to conform to mass practices, is condemned by God.

Again, observe carefully the Scripture setting: that of a Christian wife whose husband does not obey the Word of God. Note that he needs to be won. How shall it be done if he does not listen to the Word? By becoming like him to win him? By dressing like the world so he won’t consider her odd or call her a goody-goody? No! No! Never! God says, Be holy in all of life, and then He particularly speaks to the point of the separated outward appearance. And verse 4 echoes again the definite connection between the heart condition and the manner of dress. In these five verses the Lord clearly characterizes the kind of credentials that will be most effective in convincing the disobedi-