

Introduction

Today I'm going to preach about an issue that's daily for us all. In a New York Times article titled "**The Ethics of Dress,**" its author writes: "**Next to eating and drinking, dress holds the first place in the thoughts of mankind. A starving man, indeed, will give his clothes for food and drink if necessary; but as soon as he has enough to eat and drink he thinks of what he shall put on.**" She has a point doesn't she? It's said that people want answers to the great questions of life. Who am I? How did I get here? Where am I going? What will I wear today? How we dress, in other words, is important to us. But according to Paul in 1 Timothy 2:9-10, it's even more important to God. It's so important to Him in fact that He has a dress code, which He reveals in that text.

Dress the Part

Paul is writing to women here but the principles he gives us apply equally to men as well. We begin with the word "**proper**" in verse 9. The Greek word translated that means "**orderly, harmonious.**" It connotes that things are balanced or matched, which is a primary concern of ours when it comes to clothing. We want the fabrics and colors we wear to go together. My tie, for instance, goes with my suit. All of us want our clothing to match, but the word "**proper**" doesn't refer to that, to one piece of clothing matching another. It does refer to our clothing in general matching something else – our discipleship to Jesus.

That's the first principle we learn in verse 9. How we dress is a matter of discipleship to Jesus. Discipleship to Jesus encompasses our whole life. Every aspect of our life is within its scope. That includes how we dress. Our clothing should match – our discipleship to Jesus. It should be in sync with our claim that we're adherents of His.

Think of it in terms of two things. First, how we dress should please Jesus not disgust Him. And second, how we dress should cause others to

hold Him in higher regard, not lower regard. Simply put, we should wear the clothing that Jesus would wear if He were us. If He wouldn't wear it, we can't wear it. If He would wear it, we can.

So that's what the word "**proper**" calls us to do. Dress the part of a disciple of Jesus. Or as I'm saying it today, follow God's dress code in verse 9. We follow it by dressing in three ways.

Dress Modestly

The first is "**modestly.**" That word has a sexual overtone. It connotes dressing in a way that, in sexual terms, is appropriate.

Social convention, I admit, is a factor here. What is considered modest or immodest can change from one culture or generation to another. A missionary tells about an elderly woman who showed him a picture of her graduating class in high school. She ask him if he noticed anything risqué or indecent in it but he didn't. All he saw were young men in white shirts and ties and young women in long full dresses. So she pointed it out – that she had raised her dress high enough to expose her shoe, which, she said, was indecent for the day. It's true. Cultures or generations can perceive what is modest or immodest differently.

Many conclude, therefore, that we can't define dressing modestly. So, anything goes. But they're wrong. The fact is that we can define what is and is not modest. We can because the Bible gives us a guiding principle for doing so and it's this. Don't dress provocatively. Don't wear clothing that elicits sexual thoughts or feelings in others. That's the rule of thumb we should follow.

Two kinds of clothing do that. One is suggestive clothing. It's suggestive when it exposes too much of the body. The other is tight clothing. It's tight when it outlines the body too definitively. Suggestive and tight clothing have the same effect. They provoke others to lust. That is especially true of women's clothing since, as we all know, males are so intensely sight oriented. It doesn't take much to elicit sexual thoughts and feeling in them.

Author Dannah Gresh discusses just that in an article she wrote for *Christian Parenting Today* magazine. In it, she explains to females how the male mind works. She points out that graphic designers are able to control the length of time people look at an image. They're able to draw their attention to the image by making it incomplete. One of the qualities of the human mind is that completing the incomplete intrigues it. So, people will always pause to complete the incomplete image that graphic designers present to them. Maybe you've seen the commercial in which a person is standing in front of the first letters of a word. That makes the word incomplete. Most of us will keep watching the commercial until the person moves and we're able to complete the word.

In the same way, Gresh says, when males see females wearing suggestive or tight clothing, their minds want to **"finish the picture."** Low cut tops, tight tops, short skirts, tight skirts, tight jeans, and more present an unfinished picture to males. That in turn keeps them looking to **"finish"** it.

But whether they're males or females, disciples of Jesus don't dress that way. They don't wear clothing that tempts others to sin. We should think of it in those terms in fact. Would we purposely tempt someone to sin? Most of us would not. But that's exactly what people do when they dress provocatively. They tempt others to sin, to lust. International recording artist Jeni Varnedeau shares an instructive observation in that regard, **"When teenage guys find out that I talk to teenage girls in ChickChat, they beg me to beg girls to dress decently."** Her observation shows what an unloving and uncaring thing dressing provocatively is. So, don't. Dress modestly instead! Wear clothing that covers and hangs enough not to tempt.

Dress Discreetly

We follow God's dress code in verse 9 by dressing in a second way, **"discreetly."**

This (show power point slides) isn't **"discreetly."** It's the opposite,

“conspicuously.” That’s how many people dress, conspicuously. They’re narcissistic and want attention. So, they dress in ways that they’ll get it. If their clothing could talk, it would say, **“Look at me.”** It makes them stick out and that’s what they want. They want to be noticed, and dress in ways that they will be. Their motto is either **“dress to impress”** or **“dress to distress.”** Suppose I wear this suit next Sunday morning (power point). I’d dress to distress and that’s what it would do – distress you.

Pulitzer Prize winning columnist David Berry wrote an article about dress that appeared in the Chicago Tribune. Listen to this excerpt from it: **“Can young men wear their pants any lower? Their waist bands are now approximately at knee level. Where will this trend end, the shins, the feet? Will our boys eventually detach themselves from their pants altogether and just drag them behind connected to their ankles by a belt.”** That’s a good question and illustrates just one kind of dressing conspicuously.

Disciples and friends of Jesus don’t do that. They dress discreetly instead. I’m a Quaker and from the beginning of our movement, Quakers have had deep concerns about how people dress. Listen to what Quaker and founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn, wrote in that regard in 1693, **“Choose thy clothes for Use and Decency and not for Pride.”** That’s sound advice. He contends that how we dress has two valid objectives. One is usefulness. Our clothing should be comfortable and utilitarian or functional. The other is decency. It should be suitable to the occasion.

He’s right on both counts and we should dress accordingly. Be discreet not conspicuous. Wear clothing that is useful and decent, not narcissistic and attention getting.

Dress Simply

Following God’s dress code requires dressing in a third way, simply. Paul objects to women wearing gold, pearls, and costly garments in verse 9. His objection to those things is that they’re extravagant.

They do have their modern day counterparts. Meryl Streep starred in a movie titled *The Devil Wears Prada*. I didn't know what Prada was. So I looked it up on *Wikipedia*, which says this about it: "**Prada is an Italian high-fashion company specializing in luxury goods for men and women . . . The label is synonymous with opulence and quality, and is widely regarded as a status symbol.**" Notice the word "**opulence.**" Opulence is another word for extravagance. That's what so much clothing is. It's extravagance.

Few pastors routinely wear suits and ties anymore, prompting some to ask me why I do. One reason is that I enjoy them. Look at these suits on the power point and their cost: \$22,000, \$60,150, \$75,000, and \$78,000. Those are extreme examples of extravagance, and I obviously wouldn't pay that much for a suit. But how much would I pay? Let's go back to the valid objectives of clothing - usefulness and decency. With those objectives in mind, consider this exquisite suit (power point) that costs \$890. Now consider the suit I'm wearing today that I purchased at Boscov's Department Store two months ago for \$89. I have a question. What purpose would it serve me to buy the \$890 one instead of the \$89 one? There isn't any. Mine is comfortable and looks nice. And the \$890 one isn't going to last 10 times longer than it will.

That helps us define what extravagance is. It's paying for what Quakers called "**superfluities.**" Superfluities refer to features that don't serve a necessary purpose. In the context of clothing, that necessary purpose is usefulness and decency. We're extravagant, therefore, when we buy clothing that costs more than usefulness and decency require.

But what's wrong with doing that if we have the money to do it? It's two things. First, it's prideful. Remember, *Wikipedia* says Prada is a "**status symbol.**" That tells us why people wear costly clothing. It's to be envied, admired, and praised. But that's prideful and pride is the first vice. A second thing is wrong with dressing extravagantly even if we have the money to. It's unloving. It shows a lack of concern for the legitimate poor. Quaker founder George Fox wrote about just that: "**And**

let all this wearing of gold, lace, and costly attire be ended; and clothe the naked and feed the hungry with the superfluity.” Fox is saying that even if I have the money to buy the \$895 suit, I should buy the \$89 one instead, and give the difference to the needy and poor.

He’s right. So, don’t dress extravagantly. Dress simply instead.

That doesn’t mean that we have to dress like ragamuffins. We can and even should dress nicely. Clothing that is useful and decent can be pleasing to the eye as well. Aesthetics is a valid concern and simplicity allows it.

What’s the difference then between dressing simply and extravagantly? It’s this. We dress simply when our clothing is only as useful, decent, and aesthetically appealing as we need. We dress extravagantly when our clothing is more useful, decent, and aesthetically appealing than we need. We pay for luxury and prestige. My profession, for instance, requires me to wear suits and ties. But I should wear suits and ties that are only as useful, decent, and aesthetically appealing as I need them to be. I don’t pay for luxury or prestige. That is dressing simply.

Conclusion

Those then are the principles that God gives us. What we need to do now is apply them. Asking the Holy Spirit to guide us, we thoughtfully ask and answer three questions. #1 – Does what I wear cover and hang enough not to elicit sexual thoughts and feelings in others? #2 – Is what I wear useful and decent and not conspicuous and narcissistic. #3 – Is what I wear only as useful, decent, and aesthetically appealing as I need. If the answer to any of those questions is, “**No**,” we need to change the way we dress and make it “**Yes**” instead.

I’d sum it up this way in closing. Let’s dress as Jesus would if He were us: modestly, discreetly, and simply. We’re following God’s dress code if we do.