

Introduction

I'd like to share an excerpt from a New York Times article titled "The Ethics of Dress: **"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."**

The author has a point. 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? And what will I wear today? How we dress is important to us. But it's even more important to Jesus. It's so important to Him in fact He gives us a dress code to know and follow. Let's learn what that is today.

Jesus Gives Us a Dress Code

Paul is writing to women in verse 9 but the principles he sets down apply equally to men as well.

We start with the Greek word translated "**proper.**" It means "**orderly**" or "**harmonious.**" It connotes that things are balanced or matched, which is a primary concern of ours when it comes to clothing. Most of us want the fabrics and colors we wear to go together. My tie, for instance, goes with my suit. We 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 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, including 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 WWJW, "**What Would Jesus Wear?**" We should dress as Jesus would. We ask and answer the question, "**Would Jesus wear this if He were me?**" If He wouldn't, we can't. If He

would, we can. We must dress the part of a disciple of Jesus.

We do that in a particular way. We follow His dress code. He does give us a dress code you know. It's found in verse 9. It has three requirements, each of which we need to learn and live out.

Dress Modestly

First, dress "**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 and immodest can change from one culture or generation to another. An elderly missionary, for example, points out that when she was young, it was considered risqué for a woman's dress not to cover her ankles. It's true. Cultures or generations can perceive what is modest and immodest differently.

Many conclude, therefore, that we can't define dressing modestly and immodestly. So, anything goes. But they're wrong. The fact is we can determine what is modest and immodest. We can because the Bible gives us a general 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.

Let me quickly say many professing Christians disagree. Gospel singer Erica Campbell, for instance, was roundly criticized for wearing a form fitting tight white dress in a social media photo. She replied to her critics: "**This is about confidence and realizing that God made you and that you are beautiful just the way you are. I think that young girls shouldn't only get sexy images from people who are not proclaiming Jesus.**" Ponder her point. Younger girls should get sexy images not just from non-Christians. They should also get them from Christians, implying it's somehow detrimental if they don't.

That's absolute nonsense. She clearly doesn't understand what the word "**modestly**" means in verse 9. It means don't dress provocatively. Don't wear clothing that elicits sexual thoughts or feelings in others.

Two kinds of clothing do that. One is revealing clothing. It's revealing when it exposes too much of the body. The other is suggestive clothing. It's suggestive when it outlines the body too definitively.

Revealing and suggestive clothing have the same effect. They provoke others to lust, which is why disciples of Jesus don't dress that way. We 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 wouldn't dream of it. But that's exactly what we do when we dress provocatively. We 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.

The wife of Paul Washer, founder of HeartCry Missionary Society gives us a guideline to follow: "**If your clothing is a frame for your face, from which the glory of God is to shine, it's proper if it draws attention to your face. If your clothing draws attention to your body, to outline it, to make it noticed, then it's sensual.**" That's a helpful guideline. Disciples of Jesus should dress modestly, in a way that draws attention to their faces not their bodies.

Dress Discreetly

Jesus' dress code has a second requirement. Dress "**discreetly.**" The Greek word translated "**discreet**" connotes "**inconspicuous**" or "**plain.**"

The opposite of discreet, therefore, is ostentatious or showy. That's how many people dress. 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.

Some dress to *impress*. Prada products illustrate what I mean. An article I read describes Prada as follows: **“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 those last words, **“status symbol.”** They identify why people wear luxury apparel. They want others to envy, admire, and/or praise them. They dress to impress.

Others dress to *distress*. Their aim is to get a rise out of people. You’ve noticed the **“shock apparel”** that some wear. But there’s nothing new under the sun. The acclaimed 18th century Swiss philosopher Jean Jacque Rousseau was noted for dressing in shabby, threadbare clothing or in bizarre flowing caftans and robes. He intended to elicit intense emotional responses by the clothing he wore and did. There isn’t anything innovative and new about the shock apparel people wear today. They’re only mimicking what Rousseau did 300 years ago.

But whether it’s to impress or distress, disciples and friends of Jesus don’t dress that way. They dress discreetly instead. I’m a Quaker and from the beginning of our movement, Quakers have had deep concerns about how people dress. Quaker and founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn, expressed one of those in 1693, **“Choose thy clothes for Use and Decency and not for Pride.”**

That’s sound advice. He contended 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 context. Last week, I saw a billboard message from the Youngstown school system, which traditionally required uniforms. It said, **“Students may continue to wear appropriate regular clothing.”** All but the most extreme of us recognize that clothing should be context appropriate. I’d note a third valid objective – aesthetics. Clothing that is useful and decent may be pleasing to the eye as well. We don’t have to dress drably. Looking sharp or nice as we say it is a legitimate aim.

Those objectives flesh out the meaning of the word **“discreetly.”**

Wear clothing that is useful, decent, and if we desire, aesthetically appealing. Don't wear clothing that is narcissistic and attention getting.

Dress Simply

There's a third requirement in Jesus' dress code. Dress simply.

Notice in verse 9. Paul objects to women wearing gold, pearls, and costly garments. His objection to those things is that they're extravagant. They do have their modern day counterparts.

One is so-called "**luxury apparel.**" Luxury apparel is high priced clothing produced by top designers such as Oscar de la Renta, Louis Vuitton, Prada, Chanel, and Dior. According to the consulting firm, Brain and Company, the luxury apparel market was valued at \$274 billion in 2014 and \$280 billion in 2015. As examples, consider this Oscar de la Renta pencil dress for \$2,190 with matching purse for \$1490, and this two-button Sanita Suit for \$3,895. The dress, purse, and suit are "**luxury apparel**" and Paul would condemn them for that very reason. They're luxurious or as I'm saying it today, extravagant.

But extravagance encompasses far more than luxury apparel. We realize that when we define with precision what extravagance is. It's paying for what the first Quakers called "**superfluties.**" Superfluties are features that don't serve a valid purpose. Going back to William Penn, valid purposes are usefulness, decency, and aesthetics. We're extravagant, therefore, when we buy clothing that costs more than usefulness, decency, and aesthetics require.

But what's wrong with doing that, people ask, if we can afford it. The answer is it's unloving. It shows a lack of concern for the legitimate poor. Quaker founder George Fox stated explicitly what Paul implies in verse 9: "**And let all this wearing of gold, lace, and costly attire be ended; and clothe the naked and feed the hungry with the superfluity.**" Compare this \$695 Joseph Abboud suit with the \$89 suit from Boscov's I'm wearing today. Verse 9 and Fox teach that even if I can afford it, I should buy the \$89 one instead, and give the \$606

difference to the needy and poor.

Don't dress extravagantly in other words. Dress simply instead. What's the difference 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 buy and wear, therefore, only what we decide is as useful, decent, and aesthetically appealing as we need. Praying hard and thinking well, we decide this on a case by case basis in the various categories of clothing.

Take sports apparel for instance. Some of you are Indians fans and plan to buy a shirt, hat, or other apparel to express you are. You should live out verse 9 and buy what is simple not extravagant when you do. So, you can buy this \$293 Indians shirt, this \$135 shirt, this \$80 shirt, or this \$35 shirt. Which one will it be? Being a disciple of Jesus, you give prayer and thought to your purchase so that it's consistent with simplicity. You don't pay for luxury or prestige. You buy only what is as useful, decent, and aesthetically appealing as you need.

Conclusion

So there you have it, in detail – the message of verse 9. It reminds me of a disgruntled student was doing some serious grumbling about her school's dress code. When asked what it was, she facetiously replied, "**If your parents wouldn't wear, it then you can't.**" That sums up, by way of analogy, what verse 9 teaches. If Jesus wouldn't wear it if He were us, then we can't. Dress modestly, discreetly, and simply. We're following the dress code of Jesus when we do.