

Introduction

This morning, I'm going to preach about one of the critical issues of our day, one to which all of us need to give more thought. I'd like to introduce it to you by way of analogy. Suppose that you ask me to conduct the funeral service of a loved one of yours and I agree to. Also suppose that I come to that service in an Indians t-shirt, shorts, and sandals (none of which I wear by the way). What would you think, feel, and do? You'd probably think that I had lost my mind, feel angry and upset, and chastise me for being so insensitive and rude.

But why would you think, feel, and do that? It's because I didn't dress the part, of a pastor at a funeral service. And that, by way of analogy, is what I'm going to preach about today, dressing the part - of a disciple of Jesus. Turn to the verses I read, 1 Timothy 2:9-10.

Dress the Part

The words "women" and "clothing" in verse 9 reveal what Paul is writing about here - how women should dress. It's valid though to take the principles he gives and apply them to men as well. So let's do that.

I start with the Greek word in verse 9 that the NASB translates "proper." It means "orderly and harmonious." One of its senses is that things are balanced or matched. That does concern most of us when it comes to clothes. That's why some of you wives buy your husbands' church clothes. You want them to match. Well, the word "proper" doesn't refer to that. It doesn't refer to one piece of clothing matching another. It does refer to our clothing in general matching something else - discipleship to Jesus.

That's the first principle we find in verse 9. How we dress is a matter of discipleship to Jesus. Remember what I've said before. Discipleship to Jesus encompasses our whole life. Literally every aspect of our lives is within the scope of it. That includes how we dress. Our clothing should match - our discipleship to Jesus. It should be in sync

with our claims that we're followers of His.

We can think of that in terms of two things. First, how we dress should please Jesus. Our clothing should make Him glad not sad, proud not embarrassed. Second, how we dress should cause others to hold Him in high regard. Our clothing should make others more likely to respect Him and decide to follow Him, not less.

So that's what Paul, in the word "proper," calls us to do. Dress the part of a disciple of Jesus. He then goes on to explain that we play that part by doing three things.

Dress Modestly

First, dress modestly. That's how the NASB translates the Greek word in verse 9, "modestly." That word has a sexual overtone here. It refers to dressing in a way that, in sexual terms, is appropriate.

Social convention, I admit, is a factor here. What is considered modest or immodest does change from one culture and 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 a little risqué in it but he didn't. All he saw was 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 provocative for the day. It's true. Cultures and generations perceive what is modest or immodest differently.

Many conclude, therefore, that we can't define "modestly" when it comes to clothing. So, anything goes. But that's a skewed point of view. 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 go by.

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 definitively outlines the body. Both

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 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 uses Gestalt Theory to explain 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 do so by using an uncompleted image to draw their attention. One of the qualities of the human mind is that completing the incomplete intrigues it. So people will always pause to complete the uncompleted image that graphic designers present to them. In the same way, Gresh says, when males see females wearing suggestive or tight clothing, their minds want to "finish the picture." A low cut blouse, a tight t-shirt, a long slit in a long skirt, a short skirt, and so on 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 shouldn't dress that way. Their clothing shouldn't tempt members of the opposite sex 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 comment 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 dress the part of disciples of Jesus by doing a second thing. Dress "discreetly." That's the word Paul uses in verse 9, "discreetly."

For several centuries in English history, the government passed

Sumptuary Laws that regulated what people could wear. Then, when those laws were repealed, they launched out into unparalleled showiness of dress. Nothing, it seems, was too preposterous to wear. Even clergymen got caught up in the spirit of the day. One author writes about that: **“Affectation of parade, and gaudy clothing, were admitted among many of the clergy, who incurred the severest invectives of the poets on that account.”** Clergymen dressed so outlandishly, in other words, that poets chastised them for it in verse.

That’s what people did 350 years ago and they’re still doing it today. They dress conspicuously, in ways that draw attention to themselves. They want people to notice them and dress so that they will. If their clothing could talk, it would say, **“Look at me.”** It makes them stick out and in the end, that’s what they want, to stick out. They’re narcissistic, wanting to be noticed, and dress like it.

I know that by experience because I’ve been there and done it. I’m embarrassed to tell you this but it illustrates what I’m talking about so well I have to. I wore a pink suit in the 70’s. I kid you not. I actually wore a pink suit with subtle white stripes, a pink shirt, and maroon tie – even preached in it. I look back now and ask, “What was I thinking?” Actually, I know. I wanted people to notice me and dressed in a way that they would. I was narcissistic and dressed the part.

I now know better. Don’t dress conspicuously. Dress discreetly instead. Since the beginning of their movement, Quakers have had deep concerns about how people dress. Listen to something that the great Quaker William Penn wrote about that in 1693, **“Choose thy clothes for Use and Decency and not for Pride.”** That is sound advice. He contends there that how we dress has two valid objectives. One is use. Our clothing should be comfortable and utilitarian or functional. The other is decency. Our clothing 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 attention getting.

Dress Simply

There's a third thing we do to dress the part of disciples of Jesus. Dress 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 don't they. 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.

Prada, for instance, sells men's dress shoes that cost \$456. The ones I'm wearing now cost \$29.99. Going back to the two valid objectives of clothing, usefulness and decency, I have a question. What practical purpose would it serve me to buy the Prada shoes instead of the ones I'm wearing now? There isn't any. These are as useful and decent as I need. They're absolutely comfortable and will last almost as long as the \$456 ones will. That illustrates what extravagance is. It's paying for what the Quakers called "superfluity," features that don't serve any necessary purpose. It's wearing clothing that costs far more than usefulness and decency require.

But what's wrong with doing that if we have the money to? 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 get prestige, to be admired, even envied. 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 \$456 shoes, I should buy

the \$29.99 ones and give the difference to the needy and poor.

So, don't dress extravagantly. Dress simply instead. That doesn't mean that we have to dress like a ragamuffin. We can and even should dress nicely. Our clothing doesn't have to be only useful and decent. It can be pleasing to the eye as well. Aesthetics is a valid thing 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. So, if our profession requires wearing suits and ties, for instance, we wear suits and ties that are only as useful, decent, and aesthetically appealing as we need. We don't pay for luxury or prestige. That is dressing simply.

Conclusion

Those then are the principles that Paul gives us. What we have to do now is apply them. We do that by prayerfully and carefully, with the Holy Spirit's help, asking and answering four questions. First, does what I wear cover and hang enough not to elicit sexual thoughts and feelings in others? Second, is what I wear useful and decent and not conspicuous and narcissistic? Third, is what I wear only as useful, decent, and aesthetically appealing as I need? And fourth, would Jesus be glad if all of His disciples dressed like I do? If the answer to any of those questions is "no," then we need to change the way we dress accordingly.

I leave you in closing with some fashion tips. The first, for men, are from a fashion specialist. Socks must go with your trousers. Shoes and belt must be the same color. Tie must touch your belt. Tie must have an indentation beneath the knot. And don't wear socks and sandals. I won't tell you what it says you are if you do. The second fashion tips, in verse 9, are from God. Dress modestly. Dress discreetly. And dress simply. Those are the most important fashion tips you'll ever hear. So, follow them. You're dressing the part, of a disciple of Jesus, if you do.