

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

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Indecent Dress

Since the fall of man in the garden, men and women have needed to be adequately and decently clothed. When Adam and Eve sinned they became conscious of their nakedness and were ashamed - a consciousness and sense of shame needed in a world invaded by sin. They tried to cloth themselves with aprons of fig leaves, but God clothed them more adequately and decently (Gen. 2:25-3:21). It is interesting that the sacred text does not say that the aprons clothed them, but rather the coats or tunics that God made for them.

I heard a brother say that if he could find some of the fruit that Adam and Eve ate, he would pass it out to the sisters by the bushel - so that they would open their eyes and know that they were naked (Gen. 3:7). I might add that many are still sewing together less than fig leaves and calling themselves clothed.

Adornment: Inside and Out

Misinterpretations of Peter's teaching about outward adorning (1 Pet. 3:1-4) have led to several extremes. Some conclude that all outward adorning such as wearing gold, braiding the hair, and the like is forbidden. It should be obvious that this is not what Peter meant, or else one could wear no clothes because another example given of outward adorning is that of "putting on of apparel." While some versions other than the King James and American Standard say fine apparel, fine is obviously an interpolation supplied by the translators and is so indicated by italics in the New King James.

This is one of those "not . . . but . . ." passages where the "not" portion of the passage may indeed be important, but is not nearly as important as the "but" portion. (John 6:27 is another example of such a passage.) Having correctly understood that the inward adorning is far more important

than any outward adorning, one must not conclude that outward adorning is of no importance. Whoever said that "clothes do not make the man" may have been right, but it is also true that clothes may be a reflection of the man (or woman). The way that we dress sends certain signals about ourselves. This is why godly women should dress as women professing godliness (1 Tim. 2: 10). They want to signal their true character before all.

One's dress may reflect one's socio-economic standing (James 2:14). Since, among saints, no partiality should be shown based on this factor, we should not show favoritism toward one whose clothing may reflect either prosperity or poverty. However, the fact still remains that the way one dresses does say something about the person.

One's dress may reflect one's attitude toward an occasion. Joseph was about to appear before the Pharaoh, so he "shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:14). Queen Esther wanted an audience with the king, so she "put on her royal apparel" (Esther 5:1). A wedding guest was expelled from a king's wedding feast for his son for not wearing the wedding garment (which, I am told, was customarily supplied by the host, Matt. 22:11,12). All of this points to the fact that special occasions call for special attention being paid to one's dress. How one dresses for the occasion reflects his attitude toward the occasion.

When we assemble around the Lord's table to commemorate the great sacrifice of our Savior and to otherwise worship him, is this not a very special occasion? Is it a casual event? Yet, I sometimes see brethren who have good clothes, fitting for other special occasions, and who are careful to arrange their appearance for those occasions, attend the worship services looking like they had just come from or were heading to a hog-killing. Casual occasions may call for casual and unkept appearance, but publicly worshipping the Lord is no such occasion.

Dress and Character

One's dress may reflect one's personal character traits. For example, if one, with the means to do otherwise, habitually appears in public with unkept clothing, hair and general appearance; it is a pretty good indication of laziness and carelessness on his part.

Likewise, one may indicate either godliness or ungodliness by the way one dresses. Solomon speaks of seeing a young man devoid of understanding meeting a woman with the attire of a harlot (Prov. 7:6-9). Judah mistook Tamar for a harlot because of her outward appearance (Gen. 38:14,15). This did not justify Judah's action, but it does show that one's outward appearance can send out ungodly signals. How often have I heard

it said of some sisters that they dress "like street walkers" and I find it hard to disagree. A person who professes godliness should dress as a person professing godliness (1 Tim. 2:10). If Christians are not the wrong kind of people and do not want to be identified as such, then they should not signal by the way that they dress that they are.

The way Christians dress should indicate a sense of modesty, propriety and moderation because these traits should be a part of their very character. Three significant Greek words, referring to a Christian's character, are used relative to a Christian woman's apparel in 1 Timothy 2:9: kosmios, aidos, and sophrosune. The way one dresses is indicative of whether or not the person possesses these characteristics. Kosmios ("modest") means "orderly, well-arranged, decent, modest . . . of good behavior (1 Tim. 3:2, KJV)" (Vine). Adios ("propriety" - NKJ, "shamefacedness" - KJV, "shamefastness" - ASV, "decency" - NIV) is "that modesty which is 'fast' rooted in the character" (Vine). Sophrosune ("moderation" - NKJ, "sobriety" - KJV, ASV) is a "habitual inner self-government, with its constant rein on the passion and desires" (Vine).

Those professing godliness are to be governed by chastity or purity (Greek: hagnos - Phil. 4:8; 1 Tim. 5:22; Tit. 2:5; Jas. 3:17; 1 Pet. 3:2; 1 Jn. 3:3), rather than sensuality. They seek to conceal rather than shamefully (or shamelessly) reveal their nakedness (cf. Exod. 28:42; Rev. 3:18; 16:15). They should refrain from sexually provocative clothing or gestures (cf. Prov. 7:10,11,21-23). By doing this they can keep themselves pure and avoid being a stumbling block to others (cf. Matt. 5:28; 18:6-9).

What We Are Seeing

More and more Christians are dressing in a sexually provocative manner. In fact, Christians who have been taught that sexually provocative clothing is wrong and still want to wear such clothing to be "in style" are about the only ones who try to deny that such is provocative. Most people in the world freely admit that this is why they find such apparel appealing. Sex appeal is the name of the game with many of the fashion designers of this world.

Many wear clothing in public that barely stops short of complete nudity. The shame of their nakedness is revealed either by clothing that is too brief or too tight. I sometimes see sisters out in their yards, out shopping around recreational areas, at beaches and pools or at sporting events (both fans and participants) that expose at least as much flesh as they would in their underwear. I also see brothers at the same places in very short shorts without a shirt. If all of this is decent or modest apparel – pray tell what could be immodest or indecent and still be called apparel. Remember there is such a thing as "modest apparel," necessarily implying

the reality of "immodest apparel." Others wear clothing, even to church services, that may not be as brief but is about as revealing. Skirts and dresses sometimes are so short they make it impossible for one to stand or sit in a decent manner and reveal as much or more flesh than the shorts mentioned above. Dresses, skirts, pants, and tops that are near skin tight and reveal the very form of private parts are all too frequently worn. Dresses and skirts, though they may be nearly to the ankles, are sometimes slit so as to reveal the entire leg with every step. Dresses very low cut at the top are not uncommon. A person who defends the design of such clothing as decent and non-sensual is either woefully naive or shamefully dishonest.

Brothers and sisters, we need to be careful about how we dress; but, more importantly, we need to constantly examine our hearts so as to develop and protect that basic sense of decency and shamefastness that should characterize Christians - then dress accordingly.

✠ Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.



The problem addressed by brother Bragwell in the preceding article continues today. I continue to see members of the body of Christ out in public dressed (or should I say undressed) in a shameful manner but they show no sense of shame whatsoever. In fact, they make fun of the "old fogeys" who have a "problem" with the way they dress. However, godly men and women will continue to dress as those "professing godliness." (JH)

<i>Belleville church of Christ</i> 5635 S County Rd 200E - Belleville, IN - (317) 539-5258 www.bellevillechurch.net	
Schedule of Services	Elders
Sun. Bible Study. 9:30 a.m.	Charles Carpenter. . . (317) 839-3873
Sun. Morning Worship. . . . 10:30 a.m.	James Hahn. (317) 745-1507
Sun. Evening Worship. 5:00 p.m.	
Wed. Bible Study. 7:00 p.m.	
Evangelist	Deacons
James Hahn. (317) 745-1507	Leon Nevins (317) 272-2966
	Don Perry. (765) 676-5825
	Alvin Stanley. (317) 831-3514
	Mike Thomas. (317) 539-2699