

## External Appearances—Does God Care?

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What is the basis for the Christian “dress-code?” Does God care what we wear, or is He more concerned with how others see us? Some see issues such as women wearing pants or men growing their hair long are seen as matters of faith. Emotion and personal bias typically win over good old bible exegesis. We also sometimes run the risk of “arguing over foolish matters.” (1 Tim 6:4)

I’m skeptical of any man who demands that a woman wear a dress. I’ve stood behind the pulpit and endured skirts that were too short. I’ve walked through church reception areas and seen teenage girls wearing short skirts and skimpy tops. In such cases, the older women should be teaching them to avoid such indiscretion. (Titus 2:3-5) If you’re a young lady, you may not think there’s anything wrong with wearing short dresses to church, but how is it affecting others, specifically young men whose hormones are in overdrive?

Neither slacks or dresses were known in Paul’s time, so the “mandate” for women to wear dresses stems from *tradition* rather than biblical prescription. It’s a cultural issue, not a doctrinal one. Saying that a woman *must* wear a dress to church is “teaching the doctrines and traditions of men,” which our Lord condemned. (Mark 7:7)

While many believe otherwise, scripture seems to say that women should *not* wear dresses:

Let not your adornment be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses. (1 Peter 3:3) NASB

In other words, don’t wear dresses! In fact, the whole context of 1 Peter 3 is frequently overlooked by many. Note:

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. (1 Peter 3:1-6) NASU

What Peter said was, “If your husband won’t go to church or become a Christian, getting all dressed up is not gonna convert him. The tactic that *will* work is for you to show the *inner* beauty instead.” The verse does not restrict any and *all* jewelry or *all* fixing the hair. It says, “let not your adornment be *merely*, or *only* external.”

If you take Peter's words at face value, it seems that women are not to

- (1) fix their hair
- (2) wear jewelry
- (3) wear dresses

In other words, women have to look as dull and as unattractive as possible. The apostle's argument was not about a woman looking beautiful; he was saying "these aren't the things that will convert your husband."

Peter refers to the "women of old," and Sarah in particular. Look at Genesis 24, where Abraham's servant meets Rebekah, Isaac's future wife. He gives her a gold nose ring and gold bracelets! So you can't exclude a woman from wearing jewelry using NT scripture when the women of the OT clearly did it!. Those who dismiss the OT as merely a reflection of history, not God's will, need to rectify Peter's reference. Besides, coming home to a Plain Jane wife who looks like an unmade bed may do more harm to the marriage than good, especially if the husband spends time at work with perfumed and well-dressed females.

So where do these folks get the idea that women shouldn't wear pants to church? Note:

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God.  
(Deut 22:5) KJV

This is the main scripture preachers go to rant and rave about a woman's dress-code. It's the only place in the Bible where the issue of cross-dressing comes up; you won't find it anywhere else. It's the beginning and end of the dress-versus-pants argument. Seminary Training 101: *Never form a doctrine on one verse of scripture.*

If you want to get ridiculous, look at another OT verse dealing with how priests were to dress:

...thou shalt gird them with GIRDLES, Aaron and his sons, and put the BONNETS on them: and the priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons. (Ex 29:9) KJV

What?! Did God's priests have to wear girdles and bonnets? I mention this because one scholar wrote that the items "which pertaineth unto a man" in Deuteronomy were not pants at all, but referred to the underwear worn specifically by the priests. Not all men wore them.

### **Inside Outside**

The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. (1 Sam 16:7) NIV

The scriptures point to the *external* manifestation of our *inner* nature and the need to avoid sinning against God and each other. To a certain extent, what we wear or the length of our hair has nothing to do with what is in our hearts.

Unfortunately, to show the world how holy and righteous they are, many churches use external appearances to prove they're God's people. Many of its members, however, are rank sinners of the meanest sort.

We are supposed to be “a *chosen* race, a *royal* priesthood, a *holy* nation, a people for God's own possession.” (1 Pet 2:9) Since the word ‘holy’ means ‘set apart,’ Christians are not to adopt worldly ways and attitudes. God has not chosen the ungodly to be His royal priests. The world is *unholy* and not fit to abide in the Lord's presence. So not only are we to be different, but we're to count ourselves as less important—do what's in our Christian brother's and sister's interest. (1 Pet 5:5)

### **Dressing Up for Church**

My oldest son (who was living on the other side of the world with the woman who divorced me) answered the altar call at a Presbyterian church one night. He was brought into a back room and told by the elders that he would have to get rid of his rock star T-shirts and cut his hair if he wanted to be saved. They were nice about it, but the experience drove him away from Christ.

Let's face it: church folk are the worst extremists on the planet. Here's what Solomon had to say:

Do not be overly righteous, neither be overly wise—why destroy yourself? Do not be overly wicked, and do not be a fool—why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.  
(Eccl 7:16-18) NIV

Jesus railed against the religious leaders, with their ostentatious piousness. (Matt 23:13-29) Today, priests, ministers, pastors, and “reverends” wear unique clothing, collars, crucifixes and so forth to market their positions. The Pharisees “lengthened their phylacteries” to show people how much of the law they had memorized. (Matt 23:5) In like manner, some lug a bible around in public—especially one that's well-worn and cracked—which may look “holy” but gives no clue as to how much of it has been applied to the heart. The Pharisees are alive and well.

James admonished a congregation who judged visitors based on appearance. (James 2:1ff) The practice still exists today, as seen in the story about my son. The clergy is expected to wear a suit and tie to services, while the layperson can get by with more casual dress. Some denominations mandate ties for all males. Blue jeans on women are forbidden. This is all legalistic nonsense, to which Paul replied, “These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.” (Col 2:23)

## **Long Hair On A Man**

Paul wrote, “Does not even nature itself teach you that it’s a shame for a man to have long hair?” (1 Cor 11:14) The Corinthians were primarily Gentiles who weren’t under Jewish law and tradition. So where was Paul coming from? Did he mean this edict to apply to all Christians in every age? Paul was approaching the hair issue from a *cultural* perspective, not a legal one. Although God strictly forbade cross-dressing, (Deut 22:5) or acting effeminate, (1 Cor 6:9) there was nothing in the Mosaic Law that forbade long hair.

In fact, those who took the Nazirite vow let their hair grow long (Numbers 6) but that was not *society’s norm*. They *stood apart* and grew their hair as a sign of being *set apart* for God for a *particular purpose*. Samuel was set apart to serve the Lord his whole life. He was never to cut his hair. (1 Sam 1:11) He would have probably been thrown out of some churches in our time.

Male homosexual prostitutes in Corinth grew their hair long to advertise their trade. Female prostitutes cut their hair short for the same reason. Both groups *stood apart* from society and altered their hair for a *particular purpose*, in this case, an immoral one. When we begin applying 1st Century cultural practices to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christianity, it makes the church look ignorant. And then we wonder why no one wants to go to church in today’s society.

## **Can Christians Have Tattoos?**

The Law forbade the Israelites from getting tattoos. (Lev 18:28) The reason for it was because the heathens tattooed themselves in honor of their idols, not for decorative reasons. People get tattooed today for cosmetic reasons, not religious ones. We are not living under the Mosaic Law, and those who seek to forbid tattoos based on Leviticus risks falling from grace because they are trying to be justified by law. (Gal 5:4) Worse, this kind of nonsense drives people away.

Someone may think that by having “Jesus Saves” inked across their forearm promotes the Gospel. However, it is trivializing the Good News of salvation. The Gospel is supposed to be preached, not stuck to a bumper or tattooed on someone’s ankle. But if you want to do it, go for it. God’s not going to condemn you for it. Any preacher or church that does should be in your rear-view mirror.

## **Summary**

As Solomon said, "avoid all extremes." We don't want to wear clothes that accentuate our sexuality; neither do we need to wear burlap bags to make people think we're ultra-religious. We don't need to enforce early church customs on today's crowd either. There are more important matters to which the Christian needs to concern themselves. Let's work on having the mind of Christ and drop all of the humanistic traditions and nonsense.

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