



Respect for God: Our Dress in Worship by Perry Sexton

All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ. It is not my intention by writing this article to offend anyone or to make anyone angry. I am not saying women have to wear dresses in worship, nor am I saying that men have to wear a suit. I am, however, setting forth some biblical principles that should be considered by all.

To the Bible student it should be very clear that from the beginning of time God has been concerned with the dress of His creation which is after His own image (**Genesis 1:26,27**). And should not the Creator be very concerned with His created, Him knowing the consequences of sin (**Romans 6:23**)? When mankind realized they were "naked" they made for themselves "aprons," but this was not satisfactory with God. Thus we see the principle: "... the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps" -- which was stated plainly later in **Jeremiah 10:23**. **We need to examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5) concerning our dress:** Are we or other men directing our dress or is God? God clothed Adam and Eve properly with "coats" (**Genesis 3:21**). You can know assuredly that God made them clothing according to His will as seen in His Word, not like what is portrayed by some men.

It is very important that God's people, desiring eternal life, learn God's will concerning dress and abide in His doctrine always in all things (cp. **2 John 9**). But some like to ignore certain doctrines and Scripture, etc. This can be eternally dangerous. **Every individual has responsibilities to himself**, to others and to God (**2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12**): **Parents** are to teach and train their children (**Ephesians 6:4**); Christian **children** have responsibilities to their parents and must set the proper example before others (**Ephesians 6:1; Matthe 5:13-16**); **preachers** must preach the Word, the whole council of God (**2 Timothy 4:2; Acts 20:26,27**); and **elders** must warn and watch over the church (**Hebrews 13:17**).

Look into the perfect law of liberty and do not forget what you learn concerning dress (**James 1:25**), and then observe what you see in the churches of our Lord. **Not only do some not dress reverently, but some dress in such a manner as to help bring about sexual lust from others!** And this abomination is done in our assemblies of worship to God! Who is to blame? Perhaps all those named above. This article is not about indecent dress but a mere mention of it and that it even goes on in our worship to God whom we are to **respect**. What kind of respect is it to violate His Word? It is a very serious matter to lust (**Matthew 5:28; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10**). And it is a very serious matter to contribute to one's lusting (cp. **Matthew 18:6**). To tempt others is the work of the devil (**1 Thessalonians 3:5**). Are you doing the work of the devil??? Now to get on with the subject at hand.

How would God have us to dress for worship to Him? We have already seen that God is concerned about our dress in general (**Genesis 3:21**). What else do we learn very early on? **That God expects our best:** Abel offered the "firstlings" (**Genesis 4:4**). Thus in the Book of Beginnings we find yet another eternal principle which is seen throughout the Bible: **God deserves and demands our best.** This alone should give us some idea of our dress for worship to our Creator. Even sinful man recognizes the greater should receive honor from the lesser!!! How shall we present ourselves before the President of the United States? Learn from the good man Joseph: Even before sinful Pharaoh, Joseph "shaved *himself*, and changed his raiment" (**Genesis 41:14**). You do not believe this is all Joseph did to prepare for his appointment do you?

Would anyone say that Joseph "**dressed down**" to come before sinful Pharaoh? Yet, I have heard of brethren who do "**dress down**" before they come before **Him who is worthy of all respect, praise and glory!** **How utterly incredibly amazing it is!!!** On a Wednesday night for Bible class only one lady (other than Sandy) had on a dress. Please do not misunderstand me, I am not saying women have to wear dresses to worship. Another lady said to her, "What are you doing so dressed up?" This should give you a clue as to how the others were dressed – very casually, like you might expect at a football game. I think God expects and deserves better. She replied something to the effect that she had worn it to work that day and just hadn't changed ("dressed down" to come before God). Now tell me where the upbringing and teaching, preaching and watching has been from those named above? Brethren, we need to get in our right mind. Many jobs require dress clothing, even suits, maybe yours does not. But if your job did and when you got off from work on Wednesday evening, **would you "dress down" to present yourself to God in worship to Him?**

Learn from Mount Sinai, where some of God's glory was seen by man (**Exodus 19:11**). It is my understanding that this was accomplished through the angel (**Acts 7:38**). But even so, notice what God required of the people: "... sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes" (**Exodus 19:10**). Obviously they washed their bodies as well (cp. Joseph above). Brethren, this is what God said to His people (cp. **Romans 15:4**).

Learn from the burning bush, where God again is represented by His angel (**Acts 7:30**), but note what was said: "put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (**Exodus 3:5**). This was done in **respect**, a custom of that time and even today in places. Did God deserve and demand respect then? When we assemble ourselves to worship God is God not in our presence? Does not God deserve and demand our respect any longer? When our granddaughter Michal Sher'ril Knox was 10 years old some of her classmates in Bible study made fun of her and asked her why she always wore a dress. She replied that she did so to show respect for God. It seems in this day and time, few people even know what respect is.

What is our custom: an appointment with the president, governor; marriages; funerals; certain jobs, etc.? One argued to me he would not "**dress up**" to go to a funeral. It so happened, about three months later I saw him at a funeral all "**dressed up**," I said nothing about it, but it was obvious he was ashamed when I looked at him. The next time he was in church services he was "dressed up." Do we have more **respect** for man and the dead than we have for God? Oh, by the way, I think it is a shame that the only time you see some brethren in a suit in a church building is when they are in a casket! Why then and not while in worship to God?

Multiple objections come from brethren on sermons and articles like this. Why? Think about it and answer. Let us look at some recent objections I have heard, not to an article or sermon, but simply to how I was dressed for worship. One brother said to me, "You are overdressed." What, my dress is too good for God? Showing too much respect for God? God is not deserving of this act of **reverence** (see below)? Another brother (who was a former elder) said, "God looks on the heart." How true. The statement was stated concerning David being selected as king (**1 Samuel 16:7**). And David was a man after God's own heart (**1 Samuel 13:14**); both statements have been used wrongfully many times. But consider, was David's heart right with God when he lusted after Bathsheba; committed adultery; gave his brother strong drink and committed murder? If it was, Nathan and God did not know it (**2 Samuel 12:1-14**).

When the heart is right will not the body do right? Was Joseph's mind right when he refused and fled from Potiphar's wife (**Genesis 39:6-12**)? Yes. Is our hearts right when we "dress down" to worship God? I do not think so! Is our minds right when we do not dress appropriately to worship God? Note this admonition from the Holy Spirit: "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God," (**Romans 12:1**). The Christian life has to do with the spirit, soul (the inner man) and **the body, not just the heart**. Consider the rest of the story on David:

Then David arose from the earth, and **washed**, and **anointed himself**, and **changed his apparel**, and came into the house of the LORD, and **worshipped**... (**2 Samuel 12:20**, *emphasis added, PS*).

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (**Romans 12:2**).

There is a very strong pull from the world and the denominational world in particular. In an appeal for numbers, many denominations have advertized "**come as you are**." This lax/ liberal influence has taken hold on many of our brethren, for whatever reason; perhaps many want to be like them (cp. **1 Samuel 8:20**) and others, with a sincere concern for the lost may think they are doing good. But we must **never compromise** God's Word (another early on lesson, cp. **Exodus 10:26**). Does not one compromise call for another and another, etc.? Compromising truth will never bring one to Christ! We must serve God first (**Matthew 6:33**).

If we truly respect God will it not be seen in our dress, actions and speech everywhere? Worship has to do with expressing profound reverence, respect and adoration. We should show this respect in every way possible. This is exactly the reason many of us use the solemn pronouns (thee, thou, etc.) in prayer to God. Our youngest granddaughter Samantha Knox, at the age of 4, when getting her offering ready from her own money chose the shiniest coins she had because she understood we should give our best. Not only do some youngsters understand this but some elderly as well. I remember brother John Renshaw speaking of choosing the best of your dollar bills or do we pick out old wrinkled and torn bills for the offering when we have the choice? I remember brother Richard Curry speaking of preparing to worship by shinning his young children's shoes on Saturday evening. Both men were instructors at the Memphis School of Preaching.

Brethren, it is a matter of attitude of the heart and if the attitude is right the actions of the body will be right! By the way, did not Jesus teach the "second

mile religion" (**Matthew 5:41**)? Do we seek to do just the bare minimum of what "we think" we can get by with (such as assembling just on Sunday morning, etc., etc.)?

If God is concerned about mankind's dress before mankind (and He is), do you not think He expects appropriate dress before Him in worship? Paul taught "honor to whom honor" (**Romans 13:7**). Does this exclude God? Hear God! In **Malachi 1:6** we read:

A son honoureth *his* father, and a servant his master: if then I *be* a father, where *is* mine honour? and if I *be* a master, where *is* my fear?....

In **verses 7 and 8** God speaks of the "polluted" sacrifices and then upbraids them: "offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?" Let us be honest with ourselves with what we are doing now in worship. **If you were called on to show your respect to the office of the President or a king how would you present yourself? As you do to God in worship???** When criminals are being presented before a judge, say for probation, how are they presented?

In fact I just got a jury duty summons today. Guess what one of the requirements is? "**PROPER CLOTHING REQUIRED**: All persons entering the courtroom should be dressed in clothing reasonably befitting the dignity and solemnity of the court proceedings." Note the words "dignity -- The quality of being worthy of esteem or respect." And "solemnity -- A trait of dignified seriousness." What about our worship to God? Shall we, in the same attire that we feed the hogs in, wear to worship God? Many in the olden days who were truly too poor to own a suit had their "Sunday go to meeting clothes." Some today who may claim this poverty go out of services and get in their \$20,000 and up automobiles. **Are we robbing God of His due respect in our worship (cp. Malachi 3:8)?**

In the old system, preserved for our learning (**Romans 15:4**), we find the priest were to wear special clothing. I am not saying that we are to wear special clothing, etc., I am simply using this to show that God was concerned about dress in worship to Him. Compare: **1 Peter 2:9**:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the **praises** of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

What respect and praise do we show for God in our dress for worship to God?

A few condensed and closing remarks: Concerning dress in general for all of God's people see **1 Timothy 2:9,10**; **1 Peter 3:3-5**, etc. Modest has to do with "orderly, that is, *decorous*:—of good behavior" (Strong's). Now think seriously of our worship before Almighty God. What is our custom in the USA? And not matter what country we are in whenever we are in worship we are in the presence of the God of heaven who is worthy of all respect, praise, honor and glory. We must never give that up. Oh how we allow people to sway our lives in dress and other things – it should be God doing the swaying, yea "molding." God lifts people to a higher life; man so very often pulls man down, even some brethren do. Oh, the tactics of the devil! Think long and hard about this: why would brethren try to get you to "dress down" for worship? I can think of a lot of reasons, but find none good. I am not saying one has to wear a coat and tie for worship, but in my personal convictions I do. The conviction for me is based on the things I have written here. I hope you will kindly consider them.

What I am writing against are those who come to worship dressed indecently which should not be the case anytime or anyplace. I am writing against those who take no thought and make no distinction in their dress between slopping the hogs, plowing a field, going to a ball game, other casual things and coming to worship (including Wednesdays) in the same attire. It is my prayer that you will consider these things carefully and in the same spirit in which I write them. We should be greatly concerned with our dress in respect and reverence to God and in setting the proper example before others, including our own children and grandchildren, etc.

Get the heart (mind) right and right actions will follow (**1 Peter 3:3,4**, etc.). We certainly should never dress in a manner as to "advertize" ourselves (men and women). We should dress respectfully. We should not dress for show (**1 Timothy 2:9-10**), but there is nothing wrong with wanting to look nice and respectable even before men. Is not what is in the heart seen in our dress, speech and actions?

God is watching. ♥

—-- Perry Sexton, September, 2020