

Clothing

By Dave DeWitt

Clothing is important. There are two basic things the Bible tells us about clothing:

1. Wearing clothing is mandatory, it is not optional.
2. Although it varies from culture-to-culture, the clothing we wear reflects our beliefs.

The first major point the Bible makes about clothing is that the wearing of clothing is not optional. Nakedness was restricted to a marriage relationship. Genesis 2:24-25, speaking of Adam and Eve before they disobeyed God, tells us *the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed*. Nakedness between a husband and a wife is also assumed in the Song of Solomon and in Proverbs 5:18-19. In 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, Paul affirms mutual sexual rights, implying regular nakedness between a husband and a wife. And Hebrews 13:4 restricts that to marriage when it says, *the marriage bed is to be undefiled*.

Not wearing clothing was always considered immoral, except for bathing, I suppose, outside of marriage. It was immoral for the ancient Greeks and Romans to practice nakedness in athletic games and temple prostitution. In some hot and undeveloped areas of the world, some people go without clothes. But the Bible would say that is wrong.

In the Bible, it was considered immoral for Noah to be seen without clothing (Genesis 9:23). In the Mosaic Law, sexual immorality was often expressed with nakedness. Leviticus 18 repeatedly uses the expression *You shall not uncover the nakedness of...*, and it is always about someone they were not to have sexual relations with. So our only choice is **which** clothing we will wear.

The second major point the Bible makes about clothing is that clothing is part of our personal expression and identity. It reflects our mentality, morality, disposition, and place in society. What we wear matters. What we wear is not simply an arbitrary choice. After they disobeyed, God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins to replace their fig leaves (Genesis 3:21). So from the beginning, the wearing of clothes separated humans from the animals. The wearing of clothing, therefore, is a spiritual, moral expression of our beliefs—Actually, the wearing of certain types of clothing can communicate a specific set of beliefs, whether we intend it to be or not.

For example, in the Bible:

- Someone in mourning would often tear their clothes and put on sackcloth (Genesis 37:24; 2 Samuel 12:20; Matthew 26:65)
- Lepers were supposed to tear their clothing (Leviticus 13:45)
- Under the Law, unclean people had to wash their clothing (Leviticus 11:25)
- The priests and the high priest had special identifying clothing (Leviticus 8:6-9)
- A Gentile captive to be married to an Israelite had to change her native clothes (Deuteronomy 21:13)

In the New Testament, the Pharisees expressed their pride and legalism by what they wore (Matthew 23:5, 25). James tells us about the physical expression of clothing, when he says that, the rich (and the context sounds like it is the prideful rich) are identified by their clothes and their jewelry (James 2:2-3). Those outside the kingdom of God are metaphorically pictured by Christ as a man not having on wedding clothes (Matthew 22:11). Paul metaphorically describes salvation as having clothed ourselves with Christ (Galatians 3:27). God the Father is on the throne, whose “clothing was like white snow” (Daniel 5:9). Christ’s glorified state is explained in part by describing His clothing (Matthew 17; Revelation 1). The spiritual life is pictured as a battle fought, clothed with the armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-13). And rewarded saints in heaven are pictured as those wearing white robes (Revelation 7:9).

Clothing is not neutral. It makes a statement about who we are, who we want to be, or who we identify with. Clothing changes from one culture to another and one era of history to another. It is not that the Bible specifies some kind of clothing. But certain clothing declares a message in every culture of every generation. Within every culture, certain clothing will express a certain range of moral/spiritual values. Good guys and crooks may wear nice clothes, but by wearing nice clothes, they are saying they are representing good values (even if they are lying).

Since no animals wear clothing, even those who have no feathers or fur, we can conclude that the wearing of clothing is strictly for spiritual creatures [God, angels (Matthew 28:3; Acts 1:10), and humans], so clothing is a spiritual expression. It declares our morality, purpose, and destiny... and it is reflected in our creativity.

Summary Conclusion

The Bible says two main things about clothing:

1. We have to wear it. Wearing clothes is mandatory, not optional.
2. We need to be thoughtful of what we wear because it is an expression of what we believe.