

What My Clothes Say About Me

Introduction

- A. There is an old adage that says, "Don't judge a book by its cover."
1. It's not really a statement about books. It's really saying, don't judge people and situations just by what you see on the outside. If you take time to look deeper and get to know a person or circumstance better, it might give you a completely different perspective.
 2. I suspect we've all found that to be true. You may be married to someone you could not stand when you first met them. You've probably had to apologize for reacting wrong to a situation before getting all the facts.
 3. It's a good idea, isn't it...don't judge a book by its cover.
- B. It's just too bad people do it all the time!
1. Whether we like it or not, whether it's fair or not, people judge others based on the quickest impressions and the smallest amounts of information.
 2. For example, without knowing anything about a person, we will begin forming impression of them based on nothing more than the kind of clothing they wear.
 3. We may not like this and we may complain that it's unfair (don't judge a book...), but it's still true. People do judge books by their cover...and they do judge people by their clothing.
- C. Even scripture acknowledges this reality.
1. In Proverbs 7:10 Solomon speaks of a woman coming to meet a man and adds that she is "dressed as a harlot." I don't know what kind of dress this involved. In Genesis 38:15 Judah assumed his daughter-in-law was a harlot because her face was covered. The point is that there was something about her dress that said the wrong thing.
 2. It's true in our culture as well. There is a kind of dress associated with prostitution. In fact, if a woman dressed that way and complained that people assumed that about her, we would tell her that she needed to take another look at her clothing choices; that she was making bad choices that sent the wrong message.
 3. This is important because it introduces another element to our discussion. While we may complain about being judged just based on outward appearances, we also recognize that sometimes we make poor choices about our dress and appearance that contribute to those misunderstandings. I bear some responsibility to think about what I wear so people don't make some wrong assumptions about me.
- D. I bring this up because, as followers of Jesus, this issue takes on a whole new level of importance.
1. Think about it...
 - a. I don't live to myself; I live to the glory of God (**I Corinthians 19-20**).
 - b. My mission, my purpose is to help others know of His salvation (**Matthew 28:19**).
 - c. I want my life to be a shining example of the better way He offers (**Matthew 5:13-16**). I would not want to do anything that would detract from my ability to shine as a light in this dark world.
 2. These realities have a very practical impact on the way that I live.
 - a. I watch my conduct (**I Peter 2:11-12a**).
 - b. I'm careful about my words (**Colossians 4:5-6**).
 - c. It should even impact how I dress (**I Timothy 2:9-10**). The Holy Spirit says that our claim and our clothes ought to fit together; the one should not create doubt about the other.
- E. So here's the point.
1. Since I'm working for Jesus in a world that draws conclusions based how we dress, I need to give some thought to that.
 2. Because I'm concerned with my ability to advance the cause, I'm concerned with sending the right message.
 3. Which brings us to our question for this study...what kinds of things do we want our clothes to say about us? Since people will draw conclusions, let's be sure that draw the right one.

I am more concerned with Christ than culture.

- A. Let me ask you to think about a question.
1. When you are browsing the clothing racks at Penneys or Dillards trying to settle on something to buy, what factors influence your choices?
 - a. For some, there is only one factor – how much does it cost. They don't really care how they look as long as it's cheap (and we can all tell).
 - b. Others are concerned with looking good. They want to be fashionable and attractive.
 - c. Still others are driven by more base motives. They are interested in clothes that will be sexually appealing. They want the opposite sex to notice their bodies and be turned on by what they see.
 2. I'm sure we can add to that list, but I want you to think for a moment about how you would answer that question. What factors cause you to buy the things you buy and wear the things you wear?
- B. As you ponder that, let me make this suggest: for a disciple, there must be one standard that overrides all the others (**Colossians 1:9-10**).
1. My first concern is that my choices please God. Before the cost, before the fashion, I want to know that He is pleased with me.

- a. This will exclude some of the other factors. If you're choosing clothes to cause the opposite sex to lust, then your choices are in conflict with God's will. We will say more about that in a moment.
- b. It will modify other factors. I like to get a bargain and I like to look nice, but those follow after making sure that my choices please God.
2. Some are going to complain that this is hard to do in our culture.
 - a. They will point out that fashions today are just more revealing and provocative and women have an especially difficult time finding modest clothing. "You don't have daughters. You just don't understand."
 - b. Let me offer two responses to this objection. First, there are a lot of women – many in this congregation – who have found a way to deal with this problem. I may not know how difficult it was, but I do know that they were able to do it. Second, we need to hear Paul's admonition (**Romans 12:2**). I cannot be like the world at the expense of being the person God wants me to be.
3. Summary: My clothes need to say that I am more concerned with Christ than culture. Dressing in a way that honors Him and advances His cause is my greatest concern. Let me ask you, is that where our minds are when we are making our choices at Penneys or Dillards?

I am concerned with purity.

- A. This is one of the problems with the choices many make about what to wear. They are choosing clothing that is provocative.
 1. Many current styles are revealingly cut or tight so that attention will be drawn to certain features of the body. To be plain, it gets people looking at the part of the body that stir sexual desire.
 2. Worldly people are pretty open about their reasons for dressing this way. They want people to notice their features, to be attracted to them, to desire them. This is what they are seeking.
- B. Of course, this runs completely contrary to God's will for His people.
 1. Sexual intimacy is reserved for married couples (**Hebrews 13:4**). Jesus told us not to lust after others (**Matthew 5:27-28**). When we dress in a way that encourages lust, we become a party to that sin. It's something about which disciples need to be sensitive.
 2. Keep in mind that you don't have to share the evil agenda of the world to contribute to the problem. It may not be our intention to "turn on" other people. But if we are dressing in a way that encourages others to look and lust, we are contributing to the problem. As those who abhor evil (**Romans 12:9**), we ought to be mortified by the possibility that something we are doing is encouraging others to sin. To allow this to happen runs contrary to the modesty Paul says godly women ought to have (**1 Timothy 2:9**). A woman possessed with this virtue is horrified by the possibility that her clothing would encourage a man to lust for her. This virtue makes her cautious about what she puts on.
 3. Now some will hear this and complain that there are some people who will lust no matter what we wear. This is certainly true. But where are we going with that line of reasoning? Does this mean I'm free to wear whatever? Our point is not that we can wear something that will PREVENT all lust. But we should do what we can to discourage it.
 4. Let's be plain: if a person chooses their clothes based on a desire to be sexy and have people notice their bodies, then we are not sending a message that will help us glorify God and advance His cause.
- C. If we agree that we should be modest and discreet and should not wear things that encourage lust, then I have a question.
 1. How can we put on a swimsuit (which accentuates those features of the body we were just discussing, which often covers little more than our under garments), and go down to the beach and parade around in front of people who are wearing the same thing or perhaps even less? How can we take our teenagers who are battling to keep their minds pure and put them in a setting where people are wearing almost nothing?
 2. Swimwear is all about being provocative. This is why every spring *Sports Illustrated* has a swimsuit edition, but does not have a winter gear addition in the fall. The guys do not want to look at a woman in a heavy winter coat. They want to see the woman in the bikini because it is sexually stimulating.
 3. I love swimming and going to the beach. But as people concerned with modesty, we need to show more discretion about where we go (it doesn't have to be beach full of indecent people) and what we wear (I can keep my body covered).
 4. Summary: I want my clothes to say that I'm concerned about purity.

I am concerned with being careful.

- A. In **1 Timothy 2:9** Paul admonishes women to dress "modestly" ("with propriety" -NKJV, "with decency" – NIV).
 1. There is bashfulness in this word, a sense of shame, the ability to blush. It's a word that speaks to our attitude toward the line. There is a line out there; a line that separates what is proper and decent from what is inappropriate and provocative. The person with this virtue is mortified at the thought of crossing that line. They would be ashamed and embarrassed at the thought of wearing something that was over the line. It would make them blush.
 2. It is that sense of shame that causes them to pull back from the line. They choose clothes that they are confident fall within what is proper.
- B. I believe this virtue has been lost in our culture.
 1. We are not urged to pull back from the line. We are urged to break down barriers and take risks and be edgy. I suppose that's not a big deal if it means wearing red pants and a lime green shirt. But when it means shortening the skirts or dropping the neckline so guys will look, that's not a good thing.
 2. Disciples have the opposite spirit. Led by God's teaching, they are concerned with being careful. Do you ever have those shopping moments when you hold something up and think, "That might be a little too short or a little low cut?" Do you have those moments when you put something on and think, "That might be a little too tight?" At moments like these modesty steps in and pushes us back away from the line. It says that, if I'm not sure, I need to be looking for something else.
 3. Summary: When disciples are possessed with that sense of modesty that the Holy Spirit describes in this passage, their clothing will say to others that they are concerned about being careful.

Conclusion: I don't like preaching sermons like this...

It is not because the Bible does not address this issue or that this teaching is not needed. The problem is that many have made up their minds and the message is lost on those who need it most. Will you think about it? Will you approach your choices with that principle in mind...what will please Jesus? This needs to be our concern in everything. Is His will driving your decisions?