
Words of Truth

Does Casual Attire Make One's Worship Too Casual?

By: Brian A. Yeager

I received an email with this question in it back in June: "Where I worship the attire has grown increasingly more casual. The females have went from wearing long dresses, to shorter dresses, and now to pants. The males have went from clean shave, to beards, and from suits and ties to pants with shirts and even some shirts untucked and pants not pressed. One man performed our song leading with athletic shoes and blue jean pants a few Lord's days ago. I am experiencing this and find that our worship approach is unfamiliar because our approach to God is more casual. I am correct in thinking that casual attire makes our worship assembly too casual?"

My response stated: "There is nothing in the New Testament that teaches a person must wear particular garments when worshipping the Lord either within the assembly of the saints or in private times of prayer, singing, etc. There are Scriptures that teach a man should not have long hair and that a woman should not have short hair (I Corinthians 11:3-15), there is nothing about a man having a clean shave when approaching God. God desires men and women to approach him clean spiritually (I Corinthians 11:23-32). God desires purity and modesty in all settings (I Timothy 2:8-10). However, to suggest that dresses, suits, certain pants, etc. are requirements of God is to add to His word. That is sinful (Proverbs 30:5-6, Matthew 15:1-14, and Revelation 22:18-19). Do not allow these traditions to stick in your mind and cause you to lose your soul (Colossians 2:5-23). I have a sermon on this subject you should consider: http://www.wordsoftruth.net/properattireforworship_bay_2015.htm".

Since I received that email, I have thought about the many conversations I have had over the years that are similar to that email. When I preached in Virginia we had an older couple in the congregation that thought since I was a "preacher" I should wear a suit any time I was in public. I often asked them if that is what Jesus and the Apostles did, but they did not care to consider the point.

Certainly, attire means something at times. For example, a person could dress like a harlot (Proverbs 7:10). We must care about our reputations enough to never wear something that would cause that charge to be laid at our feet (Proverbs 22:1, Ecclesiastes 7:1, I Thessalonians 5:22, I Peter 3:8-17, and I Peter 4:12-16). On the other hand, sometimes a person can dress in a way to appear outwardly religious before men and bring upon themselves another type of reputation (i.e. Matthew 23:5; 25-28). The truth is, what we wear when we assemble to worship God is mostly directed by our culture than the Scriptures.

It's A Cultural, Not Scriptural Matter

Clothing originated to cover nakedness when Adam and Eve sinned and became aware of their nudity (Genesis 3:1-21). There are certain guidelines, especially in the Law of Moses, that show us that certain parts of the body need to be covered (i.e. Exodus 28:42). However, there is nothing in the Scriptures that govern how a Christian should dress when approaching God. Remember, entering into a place to worship God doesn't change anything (John 4:23-24).

What does affect us as faithful Christians is the principle of cultural awareness. The Apostle Paul wrote: *"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway"* (1 Corinthians 9:19-27).

When you apply what Paul wrote concerning our attire for worship, we have to understand that El Paso, TX has a different culture than many other places in the country and the world. How brethren dress here in El Paso, TX is not going to be the same as someone fitting into the culture of India or even different places in the U.S. Thus, the standard being of men rather than of God, means there will be differences with how we dress here than saints in other places. As 1 Timothy 2:9-10 teaches, our conduct should stand out; not our apparel. If you are the only one "dressed up", who is standing out? Doesn't that tell others who look at the congregation that you are trying to appear differently than the others? Think of the many conclusions that could be drawn from being "overly dressed"?

Conclusion

Provided our nakedness is covered and that we are not casting a stumbling block before the weak (Romans 14:19-21), there is no Scriptural standard to use to call certain clothing casual or formal. What God is concerned about when we come before Him is what is going on with us inwardly (1 Samuel 16:7, Psalms 51:17, Psalms 147:10-11, Proverbs 15:29, John 9:31, and James 4:6-10). If you are faithful, come to God through Christ instead of worrying about what is too casual (John 14:6 and Hebrews 10:19-23).
