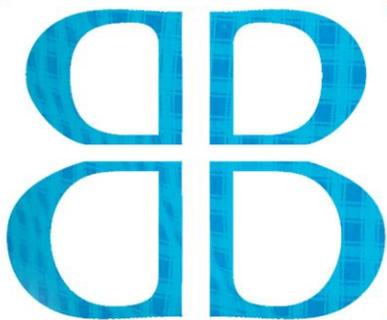


Dressed up for Church?!

A CONTRARIAN RAG ON
APPROPRIATE CLOTHING

by PHILLIP KAYSER, Ph.D.



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Published by Biblical Blueprints
307 N. 41st Ave, Omaha, NE 68131-2201
(402) 991-2421 • www.biblicalblueprints.org

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Dressed Up For Church

A Contrarian Rag on Appropriate Clothing

Phillip Kayser, Ph.D.

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Introduction: Stand out in a crowd!

Wow! I feel like a radical bucking tradition! I visited a church some time ago with my family and noticed that we got the same attention that men with piercings got ten years ago! Tattoos are so yesterday! Let me tell you a secret: if you want to stand out in a crowd, *dress up for church*. You'll instantly satisfy your craving to be different, to buck conformity and to stand strong in the face of criticism. You may end up irritating a few people in the process by not fitting in, but isn't that the point? The in-thing changes so rapidly today that you may not have noticed that *you* are not with-it. Get with the program and dress up for church!

The new legalism

This tongue-in-cheek introduction was intended to highlight the pressure many people feel to conform to a standard of "non-conformity" and to legalistically call dressing up for church legalism. Actually, I hadn't intended to write an article on "dressing up," but I thought that this subject was sure to give the purveyors of the new grace and the new legalism a spiritual wedgie. I can see them getting uncomfortable already. What could be more legalistic than writing about a dress code for church!?! But honestly, it's not about the clothes. It's a test to see if I can make the "Scandalous Freedom" crowd get curiously testy, and to come up with rules why I should not have rules.

And by the way, what is legalism? That term always gets me. It seems to be a term that is thrown around as loosely as "Racist!", "Nazi!", and "Chauvinist!" The abortionist down the street calls me a legalist, but so does the nice Christian across town. In the last month they must have been listening to the same tapes.

The way some people talk, one would think that legalism is obedience to the commandments of God! But Jesus calls this true love (John 14:15,21,31; 15:10). So does Paul (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; 1 Tim. 1:5), James (James 2:8); John (1 Jn. 2:5; 5:2-3; 2 Jn. 6), Moses (Ex. 20:6; Deut. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1,13,22; 19:9; etc), Joshua (Josh 22:5), Nehemiah (Neh. 1:5) and Daniel (Dan. 9:4).

Others say that legalism is conformity to the tiny details of the law. But by this definition, Jesus is a legalist, because He insisted that believers in His kingdom who demote the tiniest details of the law will themselves be demoted in His kingdom (Matt. 5:19). And He had the same concern even when denouncing unbelievers. Far from denouncing the Pharisees for their preoccupation with tithing herbs from the garden, He denounced them for neglecting the “weightier matters of the law.” Jesus said of the tiny details, “These you *ought* to have done, without leaving the others undone” (Matt. 22:23). Anyone who said *that* about tithing *today* would be called a legalist! Yet it is clear in this passage that Christ was concerned about the weighty matters *and* the small matters of the law.

Another faulty definition of legalism is putting expectations upon others to keep God’s commandments. These people are fine with your *private* belief in something, but will say that you are a legalist if you try to convince *them* to believe or practice the same thing. But by this definition, John, the apostle of love, is a legalist. After all, didn’t John say to others (and not just to himself), “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4)? Doesn’t Paul say to his audience, “a bishop *must* be blameless” (Tit. 1:7)? Practically every portion of the Scripture puts expectations upon believers as to how they should think, talk and live.

Others think that legalism is saying that grace enables us to keep the law,¹ or defining sin by the law rather than by the Spirit’s guidance,² or looking at man’s outward appearance rather than at the heart,³ or

¹ But isn’t this exactly what Scripture says? Paul said that he had “received grace... for obedience” (Rom. 1:5). Hebrews 12:28 says, “let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably...” The whole purpose of Christ’s atonement was “that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

² But John (by inspiration of the Spirit) defines sin, saying, “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). Keep in mind that the Spirit wrote the Scriptures (2 Pet. 1:21), convicts men of breaking the law (John 16:8) and motivates believers to walk in His laws (Ezek. 36:27). Trying to keep the law without the power of the Spirit is legalism (Gal. 3:1-5), but obviously that implies that the Spirit wants us to *keep the law through His power* rather than through our own.

³ But keep in mind that the very Scripture that is used to define this as legalism (1 Sam. 16:7) makes it clear that we are not allowed to judge the heart. All men can evaluate the outward behavior and words. God is a better judge because He can see the heart. Since we cannot see the heart, judges are not permitted to judge motives; only actions. Believers are called to judge fruits (Matt. 7:16,20).

“neglecting the spirit of the law in order to avoid breaking the letter of the law”,⁴ or a refusal to break “lesser” laws in order to fulfill “higher” laws out of love,⁵ or seeing the absence of any fruit as evidence of the

⁴ Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), p. 95. But keep in mind that God wants us to keep *both* the letter and the spirit. Paul insists that “the law is good” (1 Tim. 1:8; Rom. 7:12,16). It is we who are sinners. To approach the law apart from grace is to make it “a law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2). But it is not a *lawless* Spirit who sanctifies us, but a *Holy* Spirit. Thus, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2). Christ was clearly interested in the tiniest letters of the law (Matt. 5:17-20; Matt. 22:23) and He died to save us from our sins. Being saved from sin is the opposite of legalism.

⁵ For this hierarchical approach to law keeping, see Geisler, *Ibid.*, chapter 7. On page 288 Geisler says, “There are greater virtues, like love and mercy (John 15:13; 1 Cor. 13:13). When these come in conflict, we are obligated to the higher moral law and not held responsible for not keeping the lower one.” However, the Scriptural examples given by Geisler do not prove graded absolutism. To obey God rather than the state only shows a conflict between God’s law and man’s law. To call the love commandment the great and first commandment is to say that it is more comprehensive commandment. Love is a summary commandment, with the commandments it summarizes being a subset of love. For example, Romans 13:8 says, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” If the commandment, “thou shalt not bear false witness” is a subset of love, how can love (the ‘higher’ commandment) ever come into conflict with what it summarizes? Love is said to always fulfill, not to come into conflict with a lower law. To distinguish the love command from any other command is to fall into Joseph Fletcher’s fatal mistake of making love contentless. Love is greater because it includes the lower, not because it replaces it.

Likewise Christ’s statement about “the least of these commandments” in Matthew 5 should not be taken out of context. In context Christ explicitly says that no commandment should be violated: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of these least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

The references to greater sin and greater guilt come from several principles. The first is that the one who both thinks and acts out a sin has sinned more greatly than the person who merely thinks the sin. The one who sins against knowledge has sinned more greatly than the one who has sinned in ignorance, “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48). Even if there are commandments that are more important than others, there is no indication in any of the passages that God ever releases a believer from obligation to the “lesser” commandment.

lack of salvation.⁶ But none of these definitions can be defended from the Bible. It appears that the term “legalism” has become a weapon that is as flexible as the term “racist” has become in some circles. Opponents are intimidated into silence with the accusation of “Legalist!” As one wag put it, “*Legalism is what one calls any system which has them observe laws which they don't agree with, and a legalist is anyone who stands theologically to the right of where you stand.*” (*WiseManSay*)

In contrast, there are three Biblical forms of legalism:

- 1) Trying to earn justification before God through one’s own efforts at law-keeping rather than through faith in the perfect law keeping and atonement of Christ (Gal. 2:16; 5:4),
- 2) seeking to be sanctified in one’s own strength apart from grace (Gal. 3:1-5), and
- 3) adding new rules to the Bible.

It is the third definition of legalism that I have in mind when I speak of the “New Legalism.” Any time one accuses another of sin, he is in danger of legalism if he cannot back up his claim from the Word of God. Legalism is a sin. Therefore, to accuse me of legalism when I can back up my practice with the word of God is ironically engaging in legalism. It is giving a new standard of behavior (“Avoid this legalism.”) without the warrant of Scripture. And it is a most insidious form of legalism, because it masquerades as grace.

For example, one person insisted that any concern about clothing in church is legalism and that “those who are concerned about their outward appearance are bordering on vanity, and I thought that was a sin.”⁷ I sure wish Paul knew that before he started throwing around emotional terms like “dishonor” and “shameful” in his discussion of outward appearance! (See 1 Corinthians 11:1-16). *C'mon Paul! What's the big deal if a woman shaves her head to get attention (v. 5)! Why can't a man wear a baseball cap to church (vv. 4,7)?! Let's give a little grace, man! Let's*

⁶ But Paul himself said, “they profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient...” (Tit. 2:16). And this makes sense since Jesus did not come only to rescue us from hell. He came to “save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21) and “to redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Tit. 2:14). Though no one is perfect (1 John 1:10), the book of 1 John makes clear that we cannot claim to be Christians if we are lawless and persevere in disobedience.

⁷ Madison, on Christianblogs.christiannet.com

stop using language like “ought” (v. 10) and “ought not” (v. 7) when it comes to church dress styles!

Of course, we know that people don’t want to argue with Paul like this, so they either ignore him or make his sayings cultural norms (and therefore anachronistic for today). But wait! I thought the “Radical Freedom” group was against cultural norms. I thought they felt it their sacred duty to buck any legalism in the interests of everyone’s freedom.

Hmmm. If we say that Paul is imposing a Biblical norm, we are in trouble. And if we say he was imposing a cultural norm, we are in trouble. After all, Paul himself bucked cultural norms and insisted with Christ (see Matt 15:1-9) “that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written” (1Cor. 4:6). So this puts us in a dilemma. Hmmm. Maybe we could interpret Paul as saying that “if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom [as following the customs that I just gave to you], nor do the churches of God” (v. 16). Yes, that’s the solution. Be contentious over everything we think is legalistic in church, and Paul will let me get away with it.

Of course, who verbalizes any of this? Instead, they make people feel guilty without doing any Biblical exegesis. They tell us, “I detest the idea of a ‘dress code’ for church with a passion,”⁸ little realizing that they have set a new dress code. They say, “*The only commands in the Bible about dress code are to dress down.*”⁹

Aha! Now we are getting somewhere. Finally we can have a Biblical debate instead of a shouting match. So where does the *Bible* tell us to dress down in church? *Well*, [they might say] *James says somewhere that a man in fine clothes shouldn’t look down his nose at a man in casual clothes.* I don’t think so. It says that the church shouldn’t ignore the “poor man in filthy clothes, and... pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes” (2:2-3). *But* [they might say] *the point is that I am wearing ratty Jeans and a t-shirt so that a poor man won’t feel uncomfortable amongst all of these suits and ties.* Ah. That is noble of you. But wouldn’t it be much more noble to follow James’ advice and buy the poor man some other clothes rather than making him sit in his filth, relative “nakedness” and shame (see 2:15-16)? *Now don’t start judging me!* [they might reply] I’m not. I’m just trying to find out the Biblical basis for dressing down.

⁸ Matt Heerema, comment July 6, 2004. noelheikkinen.com/blog

⁹ Garett Pahl, at TeamPyro.blogspot.com.

*“I’m already so sick of that argument. It seems really stupid to debate. Since there isn’t a biblical command to dress up to church, shouldn’t it be based on your personal conviction?”*¹⁰ Well, that’s the point of this book, isn’t it? To determine if the Bible is at all concerned about the outward appearance of His people in church. I’m willing to dress down if that’s what the Bible commands, and I’m willing to stop talking about the subject if that’s what the Bible commands. In fact, I’m all into liberty. I love the “perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:12). But before we discuss the bounds of liberty, there are more myths that need to be exploded.

¹⁰ Austin Ellsworth, Aug. 4, 2006.

Outward or inward clothing?

One myth is that there is no relationship between the outward man and the inward heart of a Christian. This is the most frequent objection that I hear: “*I am of the opinion that God looks at your heart and not the clothes you wear.*”¹¹ If you mean by such a statement that clothes do not make the person, I agree. If you mean that clothes are utterly unimportant, all I have to do is put you into a debate with so-called “Evangelical Nudists” like Elton Robb and you will change your tune.

A person’s outward appearance communicates (and often miscommunicates) very loudly. In fact, this disjunction between the inward and the outward is what leads to many marriage squabbles. This is why I have felt it necessary to train my children in the Biblical practice of body language.¹² If our body language conveys disinterest, it does not matter how much we protest to the contrary, people will think we are disinterested. Our body must be disciplined to communicate consistently with our verbal communication. The same is true of clothing. It would be tacky to go to a wedding in “mourning apparel” (2 Sam. 14:2), just as it would be inappropriate to go to a construction job in a tuxedo. And don’t get me wrong, I am *not* advocating wearing tuxedos to church. That too would miscommunicate our intentions. My point is that just as there is body language that communicates (and miscommunicates), there are clothing issues that communicate (or miscommunicate).

When a woman is “dressed like a prostitute” (Prov. 7:10), don’t be surprised when men misunderstand and treat her like a prostitute. Our clothing is important according to the Bible. And in this book I want to at

¹¹ A comment made by a guy named Clint. Another person made a similar statement recently: “Does God really have a dress code for church? Or is He *only* concerned about the heart?”

¹² For a free copy of the “Non-Verbal Communication Exercises” that I use with our children, make a request to info@biblicalblueprints.org. The Bible speaks a great deal about what is communicated through eye contact, facial expressions, muscle movements, posture, mouth and tongue, kinds of touch, kinds of laughter and kinds of weeping. There is a huge difference in meaning conveyed by the following kinds of eye-contact: observe, stare, leer, glance, peek, wink, gape, ogle, piercing look, “his eyes beamed”, scrutinize, watchful, recognize, look in the eyes, look at one’s feet, avert the gaze, glower, look daggers, wink, sad eyes, tears, “she refused to look,” sympathetic look, undress with one’s eyes, fear in one’s eyes, longing eyes, stared into space, lifeless eyes, haunted eyes, alluring eyes, “she fluttered her eyelashes,” an evil eye.

least get people to think about what it would mean to “worship the Lord in holy attire” (1Chron. 16:29).

But doesn't what you have just said contradict 1 Peter 3:3-4? Peter commands us, “Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.” (ESV) Isn't that a command to dress down?

Not really. Think of it this way: If we take that as a command to dress down, then Peter's admonition would be to “dress down” *all the way to the skin*. Read it again: “Don't let your adorning be external” (ESV). Elton Robb interprets this to mean that Peter is mandating nudity. Or what about the second part? “Don't let your adorning be ... the putting on of clothing...” If you take this as a command to dress down, then you need to go all the way. But Peter's point is not that the inward *replaces* the outward. I think that the New King James captures the meaning well when it says, “Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward...” Peter's point is that we are failing if we dress up outwardly but fail to dress up inwardly. It is hypocritical to wear a “garment of praise” (Isaiah 61:3) if our hearts have anger and bitterness. It is hypocritical to “worship the Lord in holy attire” (Psalm 29:2) that is “properly dressed for the occasion,”¹³ but to be inwardly ugly before the Lord. I agree that many who are dressed up may be hypocritical. But the remedy for hypocrisy is not nudity, but to have an inward spirit clothed to match the outward.

But 1 Samuel 16:7 commands us not to look at the outward appearance, but rather to look at the heart. It says, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” It's the heart issue that is important, not the clothes.

Wow! That is a stretch! The text says the opposite of what you are saying. It is clear from the text that only God can know the heart (apart from divine revelation). And it is just as clear that man can only see the outward appearance (apart from divine revelation). Samuel was trying to interpret *God's choice* (something invisible) based on outward visible criteria, but God looks at the heart. It doesn't matter how pure the heart

¹³ See New English Translation marginal note on Psalm 29:2.

motive may be, the outward will always be what men judge by. It is the *only* thing that men can see. Of course, this text is a great one in showing that we can make mistakes in judging by outward criteria. Thus, though Jesus commands us to judge by the outward criteria of fruits (Matt. 7:16,20), we must never be dogmatic, because we can misjudge a person. However, Christ's point is that the outward will eventually manifest what is happening on the inside (Matt. 7:16,20; Matt. 12:33-37; 15:18-19; Luke 6:43-45).

Thus, when someone looks sad outwardly, we ought to assume that he is sad until he tells us otherwise. Likewise, when our child says "Yes," but does it with a scowl, we ought not to be satisfied that there is genuine submission.

Isn't this contrary to class distinctions?

Before I try to prove that dressing up for church is Biblical, I think I need to deal with another objection that is uppermost in people's minds. As one person (who prefers to remain anonymous) worded it, "Church finery also opens the door for economic and class distinctions which we've been told to steer clear of."

But this socialistic thinking is far removed from the Bible. I know, I know. People will immediately quote Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." But if this is an argument for abolition of all economic and class distinctions, then the homosexuals are right, and it is also an abolition of all distinctions in sex. (Hint for those who are out of the loop: So-called "Evangelical homosexuals" claim that since there is no male and female distinction in the church, anyone can marry anyone. "To insist that males must marry only females is to fly in the face of Paul's obliteration of distinctions.") But our equality in Christ (Gal. 3:28) does not remove distinctions of sex, class or social groups. It makes all people equally accessible to salvation and to church membership (notice that the context is baptism – v. 27). The Bible is replete with not only social distinctions, but with *clothing* that shows such distinctions. It speaks of:

- "Men's clothing" and "women's clothing" (Deut. 22:5). God clearly makes distinctions between the sexes on the matter of clothing. I would hope that we would still value this distinction! Especially since God says that cross dressing is "an abomination to the LORD your God."
- "Priestly garments" (Lev. 21:10; Ezra 2:69) or "garments for priests" (Neh. 7:70,72). These were special garments for use in the temple alone: (covering thighs and hips [Ex. 28:42,43; Lev. 16:4], long embroidered tunic [Ex. 28:40; 39:27], and elaborate belt [Ex. 28:40; 39:29]). Outside of the temple service the priests wore linen (1 Sam. 22:18; 2:18).
- "Royal garments" (Esther 8:15) or "royal robes" (1 Kings 22:10,30; 2 Chron. 18:9,29; Acts 12:21; cf. Esther 6:8-9) of blue, white and purple. Interestingly, David's wife, Michal, was upset with David for dressing down from royal garments into non-royal

worship clothes (see 2 Samuel 6:14,16,20 and 1 Chron. 15:27). These non-royal worship clothes were composed of “a robe of fine linen” and “a linen ephod” (1 Chron. 15:27). Though this was still somewhat costly clothing that not all might be able to afford, Michal was upset that he didn't keep his royal dignity. But what she wanted him to do would be as inappropriate as wearing a tuxedo to church today. It would be pretentious. And David's goal for going to church was not dignity before men, but honoring the Lord (v. 22). David did not have a problem with class distinctions in clothing for other occasions. It is the context that is important. And for worship he chose stylish, but non-royal garments.

- Different robes for the queen (Esther 5:1) and the king's virgin daughters (2 Sam. 13:18) and the heir to the throne (1 Sam. 18:4; cf. Gen. 37:3-4). Others in the King's household (Matt. 11:8).
- Noblemen clothed in purple (Prov. 31:22; Dan. 5:7,16,29; Luke 16:19; Matt. 22:11,12).
- The clothing of scribes (Ezra 9:3,5; Ezek. 9:2-3) who could be either Levitical teachers (1 Chron. 15:27; 2 Chron. 5:12; 34:13) or non-Levitical ministers (1 Sam. 2:19; 28:14; 15:27).
- The robe or mantle of a prophet (1 Sam. 28:14; 2 Kings 1:8; Zech. 13:4; Matt. 3:4; Mark 1:6).
- “Foreign clothes” (Zeph. 1:8) (Israelites had four blue tassels).
- “Prison clothes” (2 Kings 25:29; Jer. 52:33).
- “Warriors in full dress” (Ezek. 23:12).
- “Widow's garments” (Gen. 38:14,19) or “mourning clothes” (2 Sam. 14:2).
- “Wedding clothes” (Matt. 22:11,12) which is probably the same as white clothes for feasting (Eccl. 9:8; Is. 61:3).
- Likewise, Scripture mandates a distinction between “modest apparel” (1 Tim. 2:9) and being “dressed like a prostitute” (Prov. 7:10).
- Etc. See the New Bible Dictionary under “Dress” as well as H. F. Lutz, *Textiles and Customs among the People of the Ancient Near East* (1923), *Biblical Archaeologist*, XXIV, 1961, pp. 119-128, *Benzinger*, *Hebraische Archäologie*, 1927, pp. 72-89 for numerous

pictures of the variations in clothing between a charioteer, a king, a soldier, a nobleman, noblewoman, a prince, a slave, warrior, a diplomatic envoy, etc., etc.

All of these things indicate that there is a time and a place for a variety of clothing. What has ironically happened in the church is that it has adopted the socialistic revolution against dress codes and against class distinctions. Levi Straus recently spoke of the almost mandated super-casual dress code that has developed and said that it is "the most significant apparel trend of the century." But make no mistake about it: the world has imposed a new dress code that has the potential of being just as legalistic as any "dress-up" church can be. As Kevin D. Hendriks pointed out, "Wearing a suit at my church actually makes you stick out so bad you suddenly revisit the awkward feelings of adolescence. Except for Easter. Then it's okay."

The Biblical case for dressing up

Can a biblical case be made for dressing up for church? Let me take a stab at it. I'm sure there will be some who will disagree. I will still be friends with them. Hopefully they will still be friends with me. My main point in writing this book is to clear away some of the illegitimate arguments and get people to make decisions based upon the Bible alone.

We are indeed commanded to dress up.

My thesis is that God wants us to honor Him in the way we dress for church. And there are indeed several commands to dress differently for church, and more specifically, to dress up for public worship. In Isaiah 52:1 God calls the New Covenant Church¹⁴ to “awake” (v. 1a), to “put on your beautiful garments” (v. 1b) and to purify the church (v. 1c). All three admonitions describe ways to honor the greatness of God in worship. In 1 Timothy 2:8-9 Paul tells us what is “proper” in worship in relation to posture (v. 8), clothing (v. 9), and speech (v. 10). Three times the Scripture calls us to “worship the Lord in holy attire.” Each time it is connected to the formal worship of God in the corporate gathering of the saints. In context, the first two references are addressed to “the families of the peoples” (1 Chron. 16:28; Psalm 96:7) and “all the earth” (1 Chron. 16:30; Psalm 96:9). This shows that the command for different clothing was not intended for the priests, but applied to the Gentiles for all time. In context, the third reference is given to the angels of heaven (Psalm 29:1) and shows that the reason is not simply one of modesty, but one of honor for the Lord. The reverence of the earthly worship is patterned after the reverence of the heavenly worship. The commands for holy attire are:

1 Chron. 16:29 - “Give to the LORD the glory *due* His name; bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship the LORD in holy attire!”

Psalms 96:9 - “Oh, worship the LORD in holy attire! Tremble before Him, all the earth.”

¹⁴ John Calvin comments on verse 1, saying that Isaiah “addresses the Church,” and speaks of “the removal of corruptions, and the restoration of the worship of God...” *Commentary on Isaiah*, chapter LII, verse 1.

Psalms 29:2 - “Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in holy attire.”

Granted, the New King James translates this as “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,” following the tradition of the King James. But as one commentary said, “Suggestive as this rendering is, it can hardly be right; and the true sense is that given in the R.V. margin, ‘in holy array.’”¹⁵ However, if you want to take away my ball, I won’t go home that easily. There are more arguments that will be offered later.

Nevertheless, if this translation is correct,¹⁶ it means that we must be “properly dressed for the occasion” of worship (NET marginal note on Psalm 29:2). Since the word “holy” means “to be set apart,” this is a call to have special clothing for church that is different.¹⁷ And if this is what God is calling for, then we would expect to see Biblical examples of people who dressed differently for worship. And this is exactly what we find...

There are examples of those commands being fulfilled by priests and non-priests; Jews and Gentiles.

2 Samuel 12:20 says, “So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped.” No grunge styles for David! Instead, we see David concerned with good grooming and proper hygiene (“washed and anointed himself”) and proper clothing (“and changed his clothes”). Nor was this unique to his era. When Jacob was commanded by God to worship, Jacob told his family, “...be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God” (Gen. 35:2-3). Fortunately his family hadn’t learned the trick of calling this legalism. So Jacob’s family followed the same pattern: concern with good grooming and hygiene (“be clean”) and dressing

¹⁵ A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 148.

¹⁶ The translation of “holy attire” can be found in NASB (Ps. 96:9), NAB (1 Chr. 16:29) and NET (all). Similar translations are “holy robes” (BBE) and “holy array” (NASB in 1 Chr. 16:29; Ps 29:2) and WEB (all).

¹⁷ Compare this to the comment by Austin Ellis, “I don’t usually wear anything different to church than I do any other day.” How boring to have a life of no distinctions. After many years of mandated “sameness” in clothing in China, there has been a rebellion and a desire to buy special clothing for special occasions. People want to celebrate not just with special food, special music and special circumstances, but also with special clothing.

appropriately for worship (“change your garments”). So God’s concern is not simply with respectful clothing, but also with respectful grooming and hygiene.

Nowhere in the Bible can we find a casual approach to God. Even when God met Moses in his work clothes, out in the wilderness, God still mandated a difference: “Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground.” (Ex. 3:5). When God met the children of Israel to speak to them, God told Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready...” (Ex. 19:10-11). Over and over the priests are told to wash their clothes and to put on special clothes for worship (Numb. 8:21; 19:7; Ex. 28:2,4; 29:29; 31:10; 35:19,21; etc).

What is interesting about these instructions is that God mandated priestly garments for going into the holy place, but non-priestly garments when they ministered before the people (see Ezek. 42:14; 44:19). So there were holy (i.e., special) clothes that all believing Jews and Gentiles (including priests) wore in the temple and there were holy (i.e., special) garments that the priests alone could wear when they were behind the curtain in God’s presence. Just as there were degrees of holiness in the temple based on proximity to God, there were degrees of holiness in clothing, with the clothing worn into the holy of holies being worn only once a year (Lev. 16:1-34; Ex. 28-29). So there are several examples of laymen and priests who dressed up for church.

Dressing up shows respect for God and worship as we publicly covenant with Him.

The third reason why we should dress up for church is that it shows respect for God and for God’s place of worship. God says to those who worship Him, “if I am a master, where is My respect?” (Mal. 1:6 NASB). It is not enough to say that we respect Him in our hearts. God wants respect *shown*. Though the priests protested, “In what way have we despised your name?” (v. 6), God was able to demonstrate specific outward actions (vv. 7-14) and body language (v. 13) that showed disrespect for Him in worship. They were not bringing Him their best in worship (v. 8).

Of course, I wouldn’t be surprised if someone says, “But that’s for the Old Testament!” OK, OK. I don’t want to get into a long treatise on the relevance of the Old Testament. It would be beyond the bounds of this

little booklet. But before you go off and become a New Testament Christian, remember four things:

- 1) The only Bible that the New Testament church had for several years was the Old Testament (Acts 17:2,11; etc).
- 2) These Old Testament Scriptures were not only “profitable,” but were sufficient to make the man of God “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2Tim. 3:15-17).
- 3) Paul claims that everything he taught could be proved from the Old Testament (Acts 26:22; 2 Tim. 3:16).
- 4) He also claimed that all the Old Testament “examples... were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

So let’s not throw out three quarters of the Bible!

In any case, even if those four points weren’t true, verse 11 prophesies that the Gentiles in the New Covenant would do a better job than those Jews were doing. A good question to ask is, “Why do I wear my best for the governor of my state (see v. 8), but not for God?” Another good question is, “Why do I put on my best dress for a special dinner, but I won’t do it for Sunday worship?” What we wear shows what we think of a place or situation or person.

Elsewhere God commands us, “you shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary” (Lev. 19:30; 26:2). How did people honor the Sabbath in the Bible? By setting it apart. This is the meaning of the term “sanctified” (Gen. 2:3; Neh. 13:22). It was treated as different from other days. The same was true of the sanctuary where people met for worship on the Sabbath. The sanctuary itself was “sanctified” (2 Chron. 30:8) or treated with respect. To sanctify and to reverence are interchangeable.

And there were various ways that people treated the time of worship in a special way and showed respect for God. We have already shown how David and Jacob engaged in special hygiene, grooming and different clothes when they went to worship (2 Samuel 12:20; Gen. 35:2-3). We have also seen how priests washed and put on special clothes when they sought to serve the Lord (Numb. 8:21; 19:7; Ex. 28:2,4; 29:29; 31:10; 35:19,21). It was a sign of respect for God’s greatness.

These garments had the additional purpose of being “for glory and for beauty” (Ex. 28:2). God is not an ascetic. He delights in beauty and He is honored when we present our best to Him. Psalm 45 describes Jesus and

His church, and shows the church as being clothed beautifully (vv. 13-14). The narrator says, “So the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him” (v. 11). There is a mutual respect between husband and bride. The bride worships her divine Husband and the husband greatly desires her beauty. She worships Him because He is worthy. But she worships His beauty, not by dressing down, but by dressing in her best. In the Old Testament temple we find worship being dignified by beauty.

Is this any different than what we do when we take someone out for a special evening at a fancy restaurant, or when we meet with a dignitary? We instinctively recognize that special events require special clothing. And we feel different when we are dressed up. It sets the tone for what we are doing. This is one of the reasons why “Dress for Success” books have been able to demonstrate a tangible difference in the reception employers give to interviewees who dress up and those who do not. Even unconsciously, people feel more respected by those who dress up. It is clear that Jesus dressed up for the last Passover because the garment He wore was a costly seamless robe that was only worn for special occasions (John 19:23). It was definitely not casual wear.¹⁸

¹⁸ That this was an outer garment, see John B. Lightfoot, *Commentary on the Gospels From The Talmud And Hebraica*, on John 19:23.

So what do we wear?

So what are you suggesting Phil? If you want to take the Bible literally, you'd better look like a dork and dress up in a tunic and a robe! Isn't that what they wore in the Bible?!

Given the fact that you can find congregants in Hawaii wearing their Speedo bathing suits to worship (shudder), going back to Biblical robes might be appealing after all. But that's not where this book is heading. Much as it may surprise you, I don't believe the Bible sets a specific dress code for worship. Instead, it gives us guidelines for how we can honor the Lord in any culture.

No uniform Biblical dress code.

First of all, the Bible makes clear that there was not a uniform dress code. Believers in some cultures wore “trousers” and “coats” in their day to day affairs (Dan. 3:21), while other cultures wore tunics (Matt 5:40) or robes (1Sam. 24:4). So the *reductio ad absurdum* argument (that we will be forced to wear robes) really does not apply. Earlier in this book I listed more than a dozen styles of clothing mentioned in the Bible. Likewise, one person's best clothing will be quite different from another's. A poor woman's “best garment” (Ruth 3:3) might be quite different from a wealthy person's appropriate attire, but the fact that they were dressed up for a special occasion would still not be lost on those who looked on.

When Frontline Fellowship gave boots to the evangelists who had to walk many miles in Sudan, they continued to walk barefoot and put the boots on for church. Dr. Peter Hammond had a hard time convincing them that these were intended to protect their feet. But their hearts were right. They wanted to honor God, and reserved their best clothing for that event.

Dressing up for a special occasion in one culture might mean putting on “the best robe” and putting “a ring on his hand” (Luke 15:22), while another culture might wear different clothes that were equally “beautiful” (Josh 7:21). Christ wore the latest style of clothing when He attended His last Passover (John 19:23), but not everyone could afford to wear such clothes. The point is that the Bible does not mandate one style of clothing for church.

Culture doesn't define the dress code.

However, a balancing principle is that the secular culture should not be determinative of what Christians wear. After all, Zephaniah 1:8 condemns to judgment those who were in bondage to a worldly dress code. God said, "I will punish the princes and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel." This means that the Bible, not culture, is normative on what clothing is proper for day-to-day life and what clothing is "proper" for worship (1 Tim. 2:9). Where the Bible gives leeway, we have leeway. Where it gives guidelines, we should honor those guidelines. Where it calls for reformation of our clothing, we must think through how to honor those mandates. Paul clearly bucked culture and wanted reformation of clothing (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Cor. 11:1-16¹⁹). Isaiah 52:1 speaks of a Reformation so radical in the future that unbelieving ("uncircumcised") influences will be completely removed from the church, and the church will put on "beautiful garments" that are pleasing to God. As Calvin says, Isaiah is predicting "the removal of corruptions, and the restoration of the worship of God" within the church.²⁰ But part of that reformation was precisely the need to "put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem." Notice that this reformation is not a call to put on robes. It is simply a call to dress up for worship. It parallels the call in 1 Chronicles 16:29 to "worship the LORD in holy attire!" While the word "beautiful" may be subjective to some degree, the word "holy" indicates that the Bible at least differentiates it from other clothing.

Clothing should be appropriate for the occasion.

A third principle we find in Scripture is that clothing should be appropriate for the occasion (what 1 Tim. 2:9 speaks of as "proper"). As one wag put it "If it really doesn't matter what you wear to church, why don't you go there in a bathing suit or in a towel once in a while? While we're on it, why don't you go to a cocktail party wearing a similar outfit or a pajama?"²¹ Would you not think it a bit odd if your mechanic rented

¹⁹For a book that demonstrates that 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is indeed talking about clothing when it talks about head coverings, see my book, *Glory and Coverings*. This gives an exegesis of the passage and then answers objections to the practice of women wearing head coverings in public worship.

²⁰ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. VIII, *Commentary on Isaiah*, p. 94.

²¹<http://www.progressiveu.org/144045-does-it-matter-what-you-wear-in-church>

a tuxedo to change the oil in your car? Would you not think it strange if the best man at your wedding insisted on wearing his smelly Orkin bug suit? It puzzles me that those who think the former two situations are odd do not think its odd for someone to wear sweats to a worship service.

The Bible repeatedly shows sensitivity to circumstances when it comes to clothing. “John the Baptist had the calling of a desert prophet, and he dressed accordingly (Matt. 11:8). He did not wear the soft clothing of first-century politicians. Jesus altered His dress in order to wash the disciples' feet (John 13:4, 12). Simon Peter took off his outer garment in order to fish (John 21:7).”²² A woman is likely to wear something different while gardening or painting than when going to church. And the Scripture is full of such distinctions. Scripture also speaks of uniforms that varied by occupation. There were “priestly garments” (Lev. 21:10), “royal garments” (Esther 8:15), teachers’ clothes (Ezra 9:3,5), warrior’s clothing (Ezek. 23:12), wedding clothes (Matt. 22:11,12), etc. One hundred years ago, anyone could instantly distinguish a person’s occupation by the clothing they wore. That is very difficult today. And while a tuxedo may be very appropriate at a wedding, this principle and the next one would tend to rule it out as being ostentatious for church. One needs to think about what would be the most appropriate clothing to come before God at the public event of worship.

Clothing should be affordable.

A fourth principle is that the clothing should be affordable and not ostentatious. In connection with worship (see the context of verses 1-12), Paul says, “I desire... that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but which is proper for women professing godliness...” (1 Tim. 2:8-9). Paul was writing against the popular practice of making elaborate braids interlaced with gold and pearls. As Hendriksen commented, “Braids, in those days, often represented fortunes.”²³ “Pliny complains of the vast sums spent on ornamentation and various satirists comment on the hours spent in dressing the hair of

²² Doug Wilson, *The Case for Classical Christian Education* (Crossway Books, 2002), p. 188.

²³ William Hendriksen, *I-II Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), p. 107.

women.”²⁴ Obviously ostentatiousness is inappropriate at any time, but it is important to realize that God is not speaking against costly attire in all circumstances. For example, God speaks allegorically of how he dressed his daughter Israel:

“I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth... You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you.” (Ezek. 16:10-13)

If costly clothing is wrong in all circumstances, this would not have been an effective allegory. God was indicating that spending money on expensive clothing for his daughter was a good thing. Why? Because he was a King who had plenty of money. Abraham had plenty of discretionary funds to spend on fine clothing. But in the church, God wants no display of wealth and splendor to overawe the people. This is why David dressed down for worship (2 Sam. 6:14,16,22; 12:20). He wasn't coming to worship as a king, but as a member of the church. What he wore to church would have been equivalent to a modern business suit, or at least dress slacks and dress shirt. So there is a place for dressing down after all. Church is not the place for \$2000 Versace dresses or \$25,000 Brioni or Kiton suits. God wants “moderation” rather than costliness in worship (2 Tim. 2:9).

Clothing should be aesthetically pleasing.

The fifth principle is that our clothing should be as aesthetically pleasing as possible. Of course, we need to keep in mind the limits of principle #4, but God still calls the New Covenant people to “put on your beautiful garments” (Isa. 52:1). The Bible does not specify suit and tie, but it does specify that our clothing should be beautiful. So this principle balances the previous one and does not allow us to dress down too far.

²⁴ James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 199.

While James commands the church to welcome the poor man into the assembly (James 2) and to be willing to feed and clothe such a poor person (James 2:14-18), it does not call the wealthy to remove their “fine apparel” (2:2). Nor does it call the whole church to dress in the “filthy clothes” of the poor man so that he feels welcome. The church would be taken far more seriously by the poor if we were generous like James commands, rather than condescendingly trying to make them feel welcome.

We should strive to give God our 'best' in worship.

The sixth principle is that we are to make an effort to give our “best” to God in worship (Numb. 18:12,29,30; etc). Worship is many times called a “sacrifice,” and even the various parts of the worship service are called sacrifices. For example, Scripture speaks of the “sacrifices of thanksgiving” (Ps. 107:22; 116:17), the “sacrifices of joy” (Ps. 27:6), the “sacrifices of praise” (Jer. 17:26; Heb. 13:15), the “sacrifices of our lips” (Hos. 14:2), the “sacrifices of righteousness” (Deut. 33:19; Psa. 4:5) and the “sacrifices of... a broken and a contrite heart” (Psa. 51:17). This means that comfort is not the highest priority. Sacrifices are difficult to make. Yet comfort is one of the frequent arguments that people make against dressing up for church. As one person worded it, “these men and women have no respect for the individual’s right to be comfortable.” Has comfort now become a right?

Apparently. One pastor listed a “bill of rights for worship.” Right #5 was, “Every person has a right to be comfortable during the service.” But is it really a right, or is Kent Brandenburg correct when he says, “Casual is part of the lovers of their own selves movement, where our comfort trumps everything”?²⁵ Where has the “sacrifice” gone from worship? Do we bring lame and sick sacrifices (Mal. 1:8,13)? Our focus should be on giving to the Lord our best, or as the Psalmist worded it, “give to the LORD the glory *due* His name; bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship the LORD in holy attire!” This passage calls us to sacrificially give God glory, offerings and even our clothing as a sweet smelling aroma. It is not comfort, but God’s glory that should be uppermost in our minds.

²⁵ Kent Brandenburg, *Ibid.*

Clothing should be modest.

The seventh principle is that our clothing should be modest. Paul mandates that “women adorn themselves in modest apparel” (1 Tim. 2:9) when they come to worship (see verses 1-12 for the connection to worship). Of course, modesty is a mandate for all public life,²⁶ and Scripture expects us to be able to tell the difference between “modest apparel” (1 Tim. 2:9) and being “dressed like a prostitute” (Prov. 7:10). However, modesty is especially important for worship. One woman sadly relates her experience in this arena: “I know for a fact that my husband and many other men stumble more when they are at church than at any other time.”²⁷

The distinction of formal worship.

The eighth principle is that our clothing should be consistent with the reverence and respect for God called for in *formal* worship. We are called to worship God “acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.” (Heb. 12:28). There are many people who strongly resist this notion, and insist that public worship should be no different than private worship. Thus, informality is seen not only in dress, but also in speech and in every other aspect of the meeting. Rather than taking 1 Corinthians 14:26 as a rebuke, they take it as a mandate and prescribe a meeting where each person can talk and informally minister.²⁸

²⁶ See my upcoming paper on modesty. Though there is much relating to this issue in the Bible, the essence of the argument can be summarized as follows: 1) God commands us to dress modestly (1 Tim. 2:9; etc). 2) Paul was bucking his culture in doing this, therefore modesty is not culturally defined. 3) God defines modesty in four places of the Bible as being covering from the neck to at least the knees (if not further). For further details, request the paper.

²⁷ <http://christianblogs.christianet.com/1127473635.htm>

²⁸ Note that Paul begins this verse with his characteristic question of astonishment: “How is it then, brethren?” We might say, “What in the world is going on?” He then says, “Whenever you come together, each of you has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation.” Paul then proceeds to systematically tear apart each of those things that they had been doing. In the next two verses he says that each of them should not have a tongue. Instead, “let there be two or at the most three” (v. 27). Then in verses 29-30 Paul tells them that each of them should not be giving a revelation to the body. Instead he insists, “let two or three prophets speak” (v. 29). Then in verses 34-35 Paul rebukes the idea that each of them can speak by saying that women cannot speak in church. In verse 33 he amplifies on why “all things be done for edification” (v. 26). It is because “God is

Some of these modern worship services have become so informal that the distinction between worship and non-worship becomes blurred. Of course, this is seen as a good thing. One writer said,

“This practice [of having special clothing for church] is highly metaphoric. The changing of clothes tangibly expresses the changing of expectations that occurs shortly after the last 'Amen' of a church service. Not only do we take off our church clothes, we also disrobe from what we have felt, learned, and experienced. Our change of clothing highlights the disconnection between the church world and the real world: they are two totally different realms, to the point that we need to don different uniforms in order to participate in each.” This ought not to be. All of life is sacred.²⁹

Well that sounds good, but the reality is that God wants our worship different (or as He words it “sanctified”). Throughout the Old and New Testaments there is not only a profound difference between worship and the rest of life, but there is also a profound difference between formal worship and private worship. By analogy you could liken it to the situation of the king's child who can climb up into his father's lap at home any time he pleases. But during the king's formal ceremonies, the child needs to dress properly, stand when it is time to stand and sit when

not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (v. 33). All cannot interpret because all do not have the gift of interpretation (12:30). It is clear that verse 26 is a rebuke, not a command. Yet it is the only reference charismatics can muster for their participational worship pattern where everyone is given an opportunity to talk and to minister. Such informal worship flies in the face of the formal nature of all public worship in the Old and New Testaments and turns worship into a touchy-feely kind of informal meeting. No wonder everything has been informalized, including clothing.

²⁹ <http://www.coolchurches.com/articles/passageway4thespirit.html>, Chad Hall. It is ironic that in his attempt to make all of life sacred, he is willing to bring the secular into worship. In the very next paragraph this author continues (rather consistently) to say:

“The reason why secular music is needed in worship is that it bridges two worlds that should not be separated in the first place. By letting the secular seep into the sanctuary, we also allow the sacred to spill out of the church - out of the 11:00 hour, beyond the walls, into relationships and situations other than those we experience at church. Put another way, if you hear Dire Straits while at church, you're more likely to hear God while in your car, at work, or cleaning the house. What you've done is to break down the walls that separate the compartments of our lives. By letting the world in, you let God out....)”

But this is nonsense. Demolishing distinctions doesn't elevate the rest of life; it lowers worship. And this is always the way it works. When people reject the Sabbath by saying that God has “desacralized” time and has now made every day sacred, we don't find a setting apart (“sacred”) of every day. Instead, we find that the Sabbath is secularized.

it is time to sit. He (along with all the people) must follow protocol during the king's public ceremony days. The same is true of public worship.

People have lost the concept of what it means to worship God “with reverence and godly fear... [knowing that] our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28-29). In context, Hebrews is telling us that when we come to public worship we “have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect...” (vv. 22-23). It is an awesome heavenly assembly that we are joining in worship. Is this really a context for sweat pants, or bathing suits?

Revelation also describes our worship as being caught up into heaven and being blended with the worship of heaven (see for example Rev. 8:1-6; 4:1-5:14; 7:9-17; etc.) It is hard to imagine the awesome reverence that the saints in heaven have for worship without realizing that it calls for us to have the same reverence. And can we really say that the clothing described as appropriate for worship in heaven does not instruct our own clothing in some way? The worshippers of heaven are described as wearing the *himation* (4:4; 16:15) and the *stole* (6:11; 7:9; 13:14), all washed (7:14) and kept ready (16:15). These were garments of formal wear. All of this description of heavenly worship is designed to impress upon the reader that when we come to corporate worship, it is truly different.

The place of worship is called coming “before the Lord” (Ex. 23:17; Deut. 26:10; 1 Sam. 1:19; Psalm 95:6; etc) and coming into His “presence” (Psalm 31:20; Zeph. 1:7). God wants us to be deliberate and intentional in our coming to worship. He gave us a “day of preparation” (Matt. 26:62; Mark 15:42; etc) in which we could get ready for the Sabbath. This implies that there is plenty to think about in order to make the Sabbath special. Jerry Wragg has written wisely on this subject, so let me quote him at length.

“Still...the issue of formality is not to be discarded without careful consideration. Formal attire (whatever cultural norms exist) still serves the purpose of drawing important distinctions. We all draw a line somewhere (groomed hair, hygiene, etc.). We “dress up” for all kinds of occasions in society, and to neglect such distinctions does still send a

strong message of either carelessness or disregard. For example, if you show up to a wedding or funeral without carefully considering your attire, you will most certainly communicate to others that the occasion wasn't important enough to be thoughtful. For weddings, careless attire will perhaps convey disinterest for the beauty of the context, or even lack of proper concern for the bride and groom. At a funeral, casual wear (beach wear, etc.) may send the message that a family's sorrow isn't very important to you.

These same "non-verbal" modes of communication can be seen in a variety of other very important contexts as well (Milestone events, official ceremonies, job interviews, even a 1st date). It's not that these common concerns determine an individual's precise clothing selections (because each culture has differences), but they maintain some distinction so that we can generally communicate a difference between the "everyday goods" and those reserved for "special occasions". In the church, the question isn't "what particular fashion pleases God?", but rather "will a casual attire unnecessarily communicate that the occasion was not important enough for me to carefully consider how I look"? If casual-looking attire is all someone has, they can at least wear the best of their clothes so as not to send a general message of carelessness regarding the worship of God's people. If we discard all formality in the corporate gathering of God's people, soon we may not be able to make a clear distinction between our corporate worship and shopping at the grocery store.

Some may complain that there should be no distinction between the Lord's Day worship and grocery shopping, but none of us want our worship services reduced to a business environment, exchanging goods and services for money. Moreover, it is clear to most (possibly all) that not all casual elements of life would be appropriate at the worship gathering of God's people. For instance, sleeping (no jokes here please), lounging, sports & games, entertainment & leisure, would be out of place at a time of serious prayer, study, praise, giving, and ministry. The point is there are some axiomatic formal elements to our worship that we don't question, so we should be careful not to jump on the God-doesn't-care-what-I-wear wagon without understanding the implications. Suits vs. shorts is not the issue...but rather have I humbly and thoughtfully considered the overall context and what my dress might communicate"³⁰

³⁰ teampyro.blogspot.com/2006/05/sister-show-mercy.htm

The church historically took this position

The final reason why I think we should dress up for church is that the church in history has always done so. We should be suspicious of any teaching that is novel in the history of interpretation.

Though this is not a conclusive reason, it is important to consider. The early church made a point of dressing up, and "...one of the charges leveled by the Emperor Julian the Apostate against the Christians was that they dressed in special clothes to worship God!"³¹ "Originally these special clothes were simply conservative Roman apparel of high quality..."³² People reserved their best clothing for church. St. Gregory of Nazianzus says that in his day (375-400 A.D.) there was "no difference between clerical and lay dress."³³ "What turned this clothing into a special liturgical vesture was mere conservatism. When the dress of the layman finally changed in the sixth and seventh centuries to the new barbarian fashions, the clergy as the last representatives of the old civilized tradition retained the old civilized costume."³⁴ So even though clerical garments were a later development, dressing up for church was not.

Conclusion

What is the conclusion of the whole matter? If you were hoping that I would insist on suits and ties for men and dresses for women, you will be disappointed. Though our family has chosen to dress in this fashion, we should not be most concerned about a specific dress code, brand or style. Rather, it is knowing how to honor God with your clothing in worship. Since the Bible acknowledges different kinds of clothing, there is no problem with different ways of dressing up. On the other hand, don't be slavish followers of worldly fashion (Zeph. 1:8), or insist on one-upmanship in your wardrobe (1 Tim. 2:9). We have seen that there is a place for dressing down if our weekly garb draws too much attention to our wealth or prestigious position (2 Sam. 6:14,16,20; 1 Chron. 15:27).

³¹"Vestments," in Jones, Wainwright, and Yarnold, ed., *The Study of Liturgy* (New York: Oxford, 1978), p. 489.

³² James B. Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church*, p. 266.

³³ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Seabury Press, New York, 1982), p. 399.

³⁴ Gregory Dix, p. 404

On the other hand there is a place for bucking culture if the culture is not sensitive to the principles found in the Bible (1 Cor. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:9; etc).

Try to think about ways in which your clothing can show that you treat the Lord's Day and church as being a special occasion (1 Chron. 16:29 – "holy attire" = attire that is set apart). Change your clothes, wash up and make an effort at decent hygiene and grooming (Gen. 35:2-3; 2 Sam. 12:20; Ex. 19:10-11). Try to show respect for God and for the formal occasion of meeting with your king (Mal. 1:6-8; Lev. 19:30; 26:2). While there is no need to spend lots of money on your clothing (1 Tim. 2:9), try to make your clothing as attractive as possible (Isaiah 52:1), remembering that God not only delights in quality worship, but also delights in "beauty" (Psalm 45:11,13-14) and has given clothes "for glory and for beauty" (Ex. 28:2). If you are poor, pull out your best sweater and shirt and your best slacks or dress (see by way of analogy, Ruth 3:3; Luke 15:22). Plan for worship, and don't just throw on something convenient at the last minute (Mal. 1:8-14). Instead, treat God with at least the respect that you would show if you had an opportunity to go to a banquet with the Governor of your state (v. 8).

Be modest in your clothing (1 Tim. 2:9). Jesus said, "I counsel you to buy of Me white raiment, that you may be covered, and that the shame of your nakedness not appear." (Rev. 3:18). Though Christ was obviously speaking metaphorically, the metaphor has power precisely because of the importance of modesty in worship.

And finally, have a sense of humor about disagreements. I don't expect to convince everyone with this book, and I am willing to accept people within the church who disagree with my viewpoint. I am quite willing to be corrected on anything that I have written, if the correctors are willing to reason from the Bible. And while I give you the privilege to disagree with my interpretations, I would urge you to use the Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible.

Appendix A – Dressing For Work

All one has to do is read a few non-Christian essays discussing what dress styles communicate and it becomes clear that “the children of this world are more astute ... than are the children of light” (Luke 16:8). We need wisdom in dressing for every occasion, not just church. The following excerpt from The Department of Employment and Economic Development for Minnesota illustrates the importance of thinking about issues of dress for every occasion.

Dress and Grooming for Job Success

Many of us object to being judged for employment based on how we look. We prefer to be hired because of our skills and abilities, not because of our dress and grooming. But like it or not, appearance is important.

Employers hire people they believe will “fit” into their organization. Skills, experience and qualifications are important, but so are dress and grooming. Your appearance expresses motivation and professionalism. Dress as though you want the job, as though you already have the job. A visit to the company may help you decide the appropriate clothing to select for your interview. A good standard is to dress a step above how the best-dressed person dresses for a similar job. When in doubt, err on the conservative side.

Your appearance is a statement of who you are. Your clothing and grooming should create the image that will help you get the job offer.

First Impressions

Most of us have heard the expression, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Remember this when preparing to meet with a prospective employer. The picture you create will greatly influence your chances of being hired. Most employers form a first impression during the first seven seconds of a meeting. Not much is said in this short time; early judgment is based strictly on appearance. Furthermore, studies reveal that employers consistently ask the question, “Does the individual look right for the job?”

Clothing

There are no absolute rules regarding dress. Your selection will vary based on your occupation, location and preference. A business suit for a construction job or overalls for an office job would not be appropriate dress. The goal is to look the part, to have your appearance be consistent with your occupation. Neat, clean work clothes would be suitable for assembly, production or warehouse positions. Sales and office positions require business clothes. A conservative suit would be the recommended style for professional and managerial positions.

Common sense and good taste are the best guides in selecting clothing for the interview. Avoid faddish styles and loud colors. Jewelry should be conservative and kept to a minimum. Clothing should fit comfortably. A basic rule is to dress one step above what you would wear on the job. You want the employer to focus on your skills, not your clothes. The clothes you wear affect all your attitude and confidence levels. When people take the time to dress for success, they tend to feel good about themselves. Image alone will not win the job offer, but it will go a long way in building respect.

Grooming

Personal grooming is just as important as what you wear. You may select the right clothes, but neglecting personal hygiene can ruin the image you wish to present. Review the following grooming checklist before meeting with an employer.

| ITEM | GROOMING |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Hair | Clean, trimmed and neatly combed or arranged. |
| Facial Hair | Freshly shaved; moustache or beard neatly trimmed. |
| Fingernails | Neat, clean and trimmed. |
| Teeth | Brushed and fresh breath. |
| Breath | Beware of foods that may leave breath odor: tobacco, alcohol, coffee, etc. Use a breath mint if needed. |
| Body | Freshly bathed/showered. Use deodorant. |
| Make-up | Use sparingly and be natural looking. |
| Perfumes/Colognes/Aft er-Shave | Use sparingly or none at all. Your scent should not linger after you leave. |

(<http://www.deed.state.mn.us/cjs/dress.htm>)

Resources Available from the Publisher

- Cummings, Tim. *Ministerial Training: The Bible's Normative Pattern*.
- Davis, Andrew. *Written on Your Heart: An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture*.
- Elliot, Michael (Ed.). *Bible Acrostic: An Aid to Memorizing the Content of Every Chapter of the Bible*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Biblical Romance: What Does the Bible Say About Courtship & Betrothal?*
- Kayser, Phillip. *The Canon of Scripture, Volume 1: Biblical Presuppositions*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Church Membership: Is It Biblical?*
- Kayser, Phillip. *December 25 Jewish Style: The Ancient Jewish Celebration Anticipating the Birth of Christ*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Dressed Up for Church: A Contrarian Rag on Appropriate Clothing*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Feed My Lambs: Biblical Guidelines for Parents to Determine if Their Children are Ready for Communion*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *The Flaw of Natural Law*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Getting Christians Back Into Politics*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Glory and Coverings: A Study of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *An Hour of Prayer: A Practical Guide to 12 Kinds of Prayer*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *How to Deal with Objections to Inerrancy*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Is the Death Penalty Just?*
- Kayser, Phillip. *Leader Development: A Mentoring Checklist for Sons and Young Men*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Mature Daughters: A Mentoring Checklist for Daughters and Young Women*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *The Problem of Evil: A Dialogue*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Public Assembly: The Biblical Call to Faithful Attendance at Public Worship*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Ransom Paid: Does the Bible Limit the Atonement?*
- Kayser, Phillip. *Ruins of Athens: The Curse of the Athenian Model of Education*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Seeing History with New Eyes: A Guide to Teaching Providential History*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Seven Biblical Principles that Call for Infant Baptism*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Sunday as a First-Day Sabbath*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Torture: A Biblical Critique*
- Kayser, Phillip. *Universal Suffrage: A History and Analysis of Voting in the Church and Society*.
- Kayser, Phillip, & Bubeck, Mark. *Prayers for Spiritual Warfare*.
- Kayser, Phillip, & Pickering, Wilbur. *Has God Indeed Said?: The Preservation of the Text of the New Testament*.
- Rose, Ben Lacy. *Baptism by Sprinkling*.

Visit www.biblicalblueprints.org for additional resources.

Dressed Up For Church

A Contrarian Rag on Appropriate Clothing

Phillip Kayser, Ph.D.

Christians have great liberty, great freedom, in Christ. How does this freedom extend to what we wear to church? Does God care? Is there proper attire for public worship? As with all areas of life, the Bible is our guide and provides an answer to the culture wars of church fashion. Using the Bible's blueprints we can walk the line between legalism and abusing our freedom.

Founder and President of Biblical Blueprints, **Phillip Kayser** has degrees in education, theology, and philosophy. Ordained in 1987, he currently serves as Senior Pastor of Dominion Covenant Church, a conservative Presbyterian (CPC) church in Omaha, NE. He also serves as Professor of Ethics at Whitefield Theological Seminary and President of the Providential History Festival. He and his wife Kathy have 5 children and 9 grandchildren.



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