

Our Appearance in Worship

In our society it's easy to get laid back in one's apparel and posture; some even coming before a judge in cut-offs and t-shirt, while slouching, oblivious to how it can hurt one's case. This "be-myself" attitude may exist in our public worship of God.

Consider former peoples of earth who appeared before potentates. They groomed, bowed, fell down, and kissed feet. Joseph groomed and dressed for King Pharaoh, and respectfully exhibited the Spirit of God (Gen. 40:14-38). When prison or death was at stake, people got it, and they took no chances. When worship is treated with the laid-back atmosphere of a picnic, God is given less regard than earthly potentates.

We might think, "God knows my heart, so outwardly it doesn't matter what people see." Be honest. We draw impressions from the appearance of others; like the boy who dates my daughter! Granted, the outward appearance is not the big picture, but generally speaking, it is part of the picture. Jesus said, focus on our inward first, without leaving our outward undone! (Matt. 23:23-28)

Avoidable appearances in worship.

- Avoid throwing away all consideration of how we appear. This is the cut-offs and t-shirt-slouching approach, where one asserts his or her right to dress and posture themselves as they like. This behavior would have sent Joseph back to prison! Timothy employed exemplary seriousness concerning his influence, in that he was circumcised for the sake of opening doors for the Gospel (Acts 16:3). This indicates Timothy's conscience in all things, including his publicly viewed disposition and apparel; and it's consistent with the Holy Spirit's message to Timothy on the same subject (1st Tim. 2:8-10; 4:12).
- Avoid glorifying self. Jesus condemned hypocritical emphasis on the outward man; such as blatant gestures and apparel purposed to advertise oneself as pious (Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18; Matt. 23). Jesus said, *"like whitewashed tombs...you also*

outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

A sound approach to our appearance in worship.

With no scripturally mandated uniform or a bound posture for public worship, this is admittedly a matter of personal conscience; yet a conscience guided by the Bible. We must first serve God, and then serve others under our influence. Let's show godliness and nothing which advertises our flesh or flaunts our image; neither dressing down nor glamorizing (1st Tim. 2:8-10). We don't have to think too hard to know what is safe! Think of going to a job interview in which our livelihood depends on the outcome. Prepare for the public worship of God with at least this much conscience. For most Americans this is neither picnic wear nor ultra formal. If we are impoverished, we will do the best we can with what we've got. Good manners and a good conscience are always affordable. Overall, we must show we care.

Related to this, we must be careful about judging others (Jas. 2:1ff). People from all walks (socially-economically) and circumstances (i.e. work or traveling) enter the assembly for worship. Changes in appearance may or may not be in order. If they are in order, remember to approach it as God, who creates His people from the inside-out. However, if someone wears something which risks fleshly lust, it would dictate prompt action; a kindly given private admonition and perhaps a donation of godly clothing.

Our appearance in worship matters. At judgment, humility by men and praise for Christ will be the tone. *"Every knee shall bow...and every tongue shall confess"* (Phil. 2:9-11). There will be no hold-outs; but for many it will be too late. Only those who honored Christ on earth will partake in His glory!

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