



Does Your Appearance Count?

How important is grooming? Is God concerned about your dress and appearance? Can you be spiritually clean and at the same time be physically unclean?

By Leroy Neff

Have you ever been revolted by the appearance or dress of another person?

You may have seen, in a public place such as a supermarket or a movie theater, an unshaven man dressed in ill-fitting, dirty clothing, and wondered why he would allow himself to be seen like that.

Have you ever seen a woman with unusual makeup, a wild hairdo and garish clothing? You might have shrunk back, thinking she looked like a witch.

What about young men with

straggly, dirty hair, dressed in torn T-shirts and tattered jeans, perhaps barefoot? When you come across such a sight in a shopping center or on the street, don't you wonder what kind of parents such young men have?

Surely you have seen such people, and you probably couldn't understand why someone would have such poor taste or such a lack of concern for others as to appear in public like that.

In recent years the fad has been "dressing down" instead of "dressing up." Wearing old-looking, mismatched, ragged clothing, even to special functions, has become perfectly acceptable.

When I was a boy I was forced, because our family was poor, to wear bib overalls. This was somewhat demeaning for me, as other boys from more prosperous families could wear shirts and trousers.

Today, though, bib overalls seem to be perfectly proper garb for anyone of either sex. Apparently what was work clothing to an earlier generation is now *de rigueur* in most any situation for many city folk.

You probably have seen someone with long hair walking down the street and couldn't be sure whether the person was male or female.

An abysmal lack of training in dress, grooming and hygiene, evidenced by the increasing number of

Photo by Roland Rees

"strange"-looking people on display in public, is apparent today. You can see such people at almost any time in almost any locale.

But wait. You may see sights that are unpleasant or appear improper to you, but are you concerned about how *you* look?

How do you appear to God?

You may easily see many faults in the dress and appearance of others, especially when they are extreme. But how do you appear to other people? And more important, how do you appear before God? Is He concerned?

God most certainly does care about how you look. If you are a true Christian, you are one of the few lights in this dark world (Matt. 5:14). But what kind of a light are you?

God's mind is expressed in the Bible, so let's see some of the things God says in the Bible about grooming and dress.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, He commanded them to dress and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15). Here is a great principle: We should properly care for what God gives us. We should not let it grow up in weeds and thistles. It should be kept in good condition, neat and orderly.

This principle applies to our property and our homes, as well as to our persons. It includes how we dress, how we keep our hair, how clean we are. God says our bodies are the temple of His Holy Spirit (I Cor. 3:17).

Can you imagine God's holy Temple, as described in Ezekiel 40-48, in a dirty, filthy, unkempt condition? Of course not!

When Adam and Eve first decided to make clothing for themselves, they selected materials that could be easily put together. They took large fig leaves and sewed them together (Gen. 3:7).

Too many people are like that today: They make only a minimal effort to properly clothe themselves, and just "throw something together." Or they may wear some cast-off, worn-out, poorly designed or shoddily constructed garment.

God does not do things this way. When He made clothing for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21), He made outer garments of leather or fur and

clothed them. He did not make loin-cloth out of animal skins, as some people think — the Bible says God made coats for Adam and Eve. The outer garments God made for them were of the finest, most durable material.

God commands cleanliness

When God established His law with ancient Israel, He gave the people certain physical laws that regulated their relationships with each other. Among these laws were regulations concerning cleanliness and sanitation.

If a person sinned or became ceremonially unclean, he or she had to go through a certain ritual, which usually included bathing in water. These laws were intended to teach the people obedience. The washings pictured the spiritual cleanness that would later be available through the sacrifice of Christ.

The laws relating to these carnal or physical washings are no longer a religious obligation today, as the apostle Paul explained (Heb. 9:10).

Yet the people who obeyed these physical laws of cleanliness were different from the gentiles around them. The gentiles did not have such laws that caused them to learn physical cleanliness. Since the Israelites frequently became ceremonially unclean, they had to bathe frequently. Imagine, if you will, state laws that commanded people to bathe frequently!

The parents of those early Israelites surely taught their children to be clean, too. Some of this teaching has been handed down from generation to generation to the present time. Today, the nations that are aware of and apply the principles of cleanliness reap numerous benefits.

God was particularly concerned about His priests. The priests were bound by even stricter regulations concerning cleanliness than were the lay people. The priests had to be physically clean when they ministered in the tabernacle or Temple.

The whole subject of cleanness of person and dress for the priesthood was summed up in Isaiah 52:11: "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord."

When God came down to speak to the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai, He

gave Moses specific instruction about how the people should appear before Him. They were commanded to wash their clothes (Ex. 19:10).

God did not permit His people to appear before Him physically dirty and wearing unkempt clothing, as many religious people today appear before their gods. We know God requires spiritual cleanliness today, but those who really are developing clean spiritual character should be practicing traits of physical cleanliness, too.

God is still particular about how His people appear before Him — for instance, at Sabbath services. But some people have not learned this yet. It is time to put away ignorance, disrespect and filthiness. God will not permit us to inherit His Kingdom if we have not been spiritually washed as a result of Christ's great sacrifice, and unless we also learn how to appear before Him respectfully, humbly, with appropriate clothing and clean!

Christ our example

Ezekiel 16 describes how God provided for ancient Jerusalem, which is a type of all Israel. In this passage, Israel is likened to a woman with Christ as her husband.

One of the first things Christ did when He found Israel was wash her and make her clean (verse 9). Notice how lavish God was with His gifts of clothing and jewelry for His bride. He provided only the finest clothing and jewels.

God is no cheapskate or tightwad. He is not out of touch with reality. The best is none too good for God. He expects the best from His servants, and in turn will pour out blessings we are not able to contain (Mal. 3:10).

God will prosper the faithful servant who obeys Him. It is God's desire that we all might prosper and be in health (III John 2).

God calls the weak and poor of the world (I Cor. 1:26-31, 2:5), but He does not expect us to stay that way. He expects us to prosper after we obey Him and change our ways, though this may take quite a time for some. This will make it possible to improve conditions that are not acceptable to Him.

Jesus showed that different occa-

sions require different kinds of clothing. In His parable of the wedding supper (Matt. 22:1-14), there was an appropriate garment for the occasion and no other was acceptable. Regular street dress, work clothes or the like would not do.

How would you dress for a wedding? Would you women come in your old housedress and you men in old work clothes? Of course not! You would dress for the occasion.

And yet many people are less concerned about how they appear before God on His Holy Sabbath than they are about how they appear at a wedding or funeral. We are more concerned about what people in the world think than we are about what God thinks.

White clothing is a symbol of righteousness (Rev. 19:8). Clothing that is really white is clean.

The angels are described in many places in the Bible as appearing in bright, white apparel. They are clothed in righteousness. For instance, Mary saw "two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain" (John 20:12).

If we overcome and qualify for God's Kingdom, we also will be clothed in white. This clothing will be fine linen, clean and white (Rev. 3:5, 19:8) and without spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:27). God will not give His own born sons ill-fitting, threadbare or filthy clothing. He does not want His begotten sons to appear that way now.

What kind of example are you setting?

But some of God's begotten sons are not concerned about proper dress and cleanliness.

People have appeared before God at His services in shameful ways. They have come to His annual Holy Days, Bible studies and church services in all manner of improper clothing.

We all ought to examine ourselves concerning our clothing before we appear before God in church services. We ought to wear the best clothing we have, and our clothes should be cleaned and pressed.

Men normally ought to be in suits, with jacket and tie, and the women in their best dresses. A few exceptions

exist in some areas of the world, where custom or weather conditions dictate otherwise.

You women should ask yourselves if your attire conforms to the scriptural admonition regarding modest apparel (I Tim. 2:9). A few women in God's Church need to learn what modesty in dress really is. In some cases it might be necessary to ask your husband, or if you are a young woman you may need to ask a mature older woman.

We all should have had a bath, unless some unusual or extreme situation on a rare occasion may prevent that. We should not be overdressed or trying to imitate the latest fad or fashion. We need balance and propriety in our clothing and dress.

If you were going to have a private audience with Britain's Queen Elizabeth or U.S. President Ronald Reagan, how would you dress? Would you wear dirty, unpressed, ill-fitting clothes? Would you men come with a sport shirt and no tie, unshined shoes, uncombed hair? Would you women wear the same housedress or slacks that you had been wearing to clean the house? Of course not!

You would probably take more pains and be more concerned about how you would appear to one of this world's rulers than you now are concerned about how you appear before God, the great King of all the universe! What a shame! We are in God's presence when we attend His church services. We must always keep that in mind.

Some give the excuse that they are poor. It doesn't cost money to wash your clothes and press them or to mend them. But it does take work! Of course, it does cost money to have clothes dry-cleaned. After they have been cleaned and worn once, you may find it necessary to press them before they are worn again.

Some people who come to church really appear "run down at the heels." Yet some of these same people have good incomes. Sometimes they make more money than people who do present a good appearance. The concern a person shows and the effort he goes to are more important than how much money he makes.

People who should have known better have appeared at our Ambassa-

dor College commencement exercises dressed in clothing that should only be worn at casual occasions such as picnics or family outings. Commencement is a special occasion when suits and ties are expected for men and nice dresses should be worn by women. It is no time to appear in everyday or sports clothing.

God will supply your need

Jesus told us that we should seek His Kingdom first — that He would supply our physical necessities, including clothing: "Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" (Matt. 6:30).

How does God go about clothing us? He no longer makes fine leather or fur garments for us as He did for Adam and Eve. But if we seek God's Kingdom first and are diligent, He will make more readily available to us (by increased income, lower expenses, better "breaks") the materials or money for proper garments.

God has made a wealth of fine materials available for clothing: cotton, linen, silk, wool, furs, synthetics. We can have inferior, poorly designed, ill-fitting clothing that doesn't take much work to construct. Or we can select better quality materials, design them well and as a result have superior garments.

People are the products of the cultures in which they were reared. Many are too lazy or indifferent to improve themselves or their environments. But as God's people we must change if we are to grow enough to enter God's Kingdom. If we are used to shoddy goods, we must change. If we are used to filth and squalor, we must change.

God is now giving us time to change and grow to be more like Jesus Christ. Christ wore quality, seamless clothing (John 19:23). He was neat and orderly in His personal habits. He is the Author of order and beauty, not confusion, chaos and filth.

If you cannot improve your conditions because of low income, take your problem directly to God in fervent, heartrending prayer. Remind God of His promises, such as the
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THEY have eternal life inherent — do THEY have an immortal soul — is ANY eternal life inherent in them?

LISTEN: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (I John 3:15).

GOD'S WORD says plainly such a person does NOT have an immortal soul! To our first parent, God said, "DUST *thou* art, and unto dust shalt THOU return" (Gen. 3:19). He didn't say "your body that you live in" — He said "Dust THOU art."

YOUR Bible says man is MORTAL, but nowhere does it say he is immortal. Man is mortal flesh, subject to corruption — DEATH! All have sinned, and the penalty is DEATH for all ETERNITY — eternal DEATH!

But in John 4:24 it is written, "GOD is a SPIRIT." And again, "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26).

Notice also I John 5:11-12: "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

Christ Jesus is a LIVING Savior! He DIED to pay the DEATH penalty for YOU — that your past guilt might be erased! God RAISED Him from the dead, to make a resurrection to ETERNAL LIFE possible for YOU. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the LIFE" (John 11:25).

Paul wrote, "But now is Christ RISEN from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (I Cor. 15:20).

Why the Gospel of the Kingdom?

But His resurrection made possible NOT ONLY *your* personal salvation and mine, but the resurrection of this dying WORLD!

For Christ was raised from the dead to ascend to the throne of God the Father in heaven to be GLORIFIED — to RECEIVE for Himself the KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD — and He promised that if He *went*, He would COME AGAIN — coming this time as KING of kings and LORD of lords, to RULE THE WORLD with the supernatural power of God — to bring us the happy WORLD TOMORROW! Jesus' GOSPEL was the GOOD NEWS of the

Kingdom of God — the REIGN of God — WORLD RULE!

The CONDITIONS to entering that glorious and GLORIFIED Kingdom are these: "REPENT" — repent of YOUR ways, YOUR thoughts, the ways of this world, the ways that have seemed RIGHT to a man, but are contrary to God's perfect and holy LAW — and "BELIEVE." Yes, believe the GOSPEL — believe on CHRIST as personal Savior.

The inspired Peter pointed the way: "REPENT, and BE BAPTIZED," he said, "... and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy [Spirit]" (Acts 2:38). That's the way to salvation — the way into eternal inheritance in the KINGDOM OF GOD.

At the RESURRECTION of the JUST — at Christ's coming — it is proclaimed: "The kingdoms [the *governments*] of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his CHRIST; and HE shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

If WE repent, believe and are BEGOTTEN of God now — if we OVERCOME and *grow* in grace and knowledge — we shall sit WITH Christ on His throne — we shall be given power over the nations to RULE them with a rod of iron, as kings and priests under Christ the KING of kings.

And now one glimpse into that RESURRECTED world — the glorious, happy WORLD TOMORROW — lying at PEACE, at last:

"But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

"And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

"And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Mic. 4:1-3).

GOD SPEED THAT HAPPY DAY! Let us pray, "THY Kingdom come." □

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promise in Matthew 6:30, and of your faithfulness in seeking His Kingdom first.

If you do, God will hear and answer in remarkable ways. Also, don't hesitate or be ashamed to counsel with God's ministers about problems in this area.

Here are some simple guidelines you should follow at all times — not just on the Sabbath:

You should bathe daily. You should wear appropriate clothing for the occasion. Your hair should be clean and well groomed.

God commands that men should have short hair and women long hair (I Cor. 11:14-15), yet some men in the Church have longer hair than some women.

If you do not know how to dress appropriately for God's Sabbath, look for good examples in your congregation. The ministers of God's Church and their wives generally set a good example. They have been taught at Ambassador College about proper grooming. Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong has instructed the ministers on many occasions about this important subject, and he himself sets a high standard for all of us to follow.

God's way is to change, to work hard and improve in every way, physically and spiritually. Are you following this way? Are you improving in your grooming? Do you wear proper clothing for each occasion and keep yourself clean?

If you are a husband, you should supply a sufficient amount of money or materials for clothing for your wife and children. Wives, familiarize yourself with Proverbs 31:19, 21-22, 24, which shows that a good wife will be supplying appropriate quality clothing for her family. Grow toward the perfect example of Jesus Christ. Strive for balance.

The next time you appear before Jesus Christ in His services, show your respect, admiration and love for Him by dressing and preparing properly for the occasion. Be clean and wear your best appropriate clothing cleaned and pressed. Glorify God in your body! □