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Maturity in Dress and Appearance

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LAST week we discussed the value of Christian maturity. We also touched on the fact that one way this maturity is revealed is by the manner in which a Christian relates to the ever-changing world about him. Does he, chameleonlike, automatically and unthinkingly take on the coloration of his surroundings, or is he controlled by principle and conviction? Declares Ellen G. White: Christians "should manifest a noble independence and moral courage to be right, if all the world differ from them" (*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 458).

This week we wish to discuss briefly this principle as it relates to dress.

It would be marvelous indeed if Christians were mature enough to "manifest a noble independence" in the matter of dress instead of responding like puppets to every whim (or even sneeze) of the fashion designers. How pathetic Christians must appear to the angels as they watch them following one fad after another.

True, Sister White wrote that "Christians should not take pains to make themselves a gazestock by dressing differently from the world. . . . If the world introduce a modest, convenient, and healthful mode of dress, which is in accordance with the Bible, it will not change our relation to God or to the world to adopt such a style of dress."—*Ibid.*, pp. 458, 459. But let us not forget that the statement contains a qualifier—"which is in accordance with the Bible." In the remaining part of the paragraph she gives this point additional emphasis: "Christians should follow Christ and make their dress conform to God's word. They should shun extremes. They should humbly pursue a straightforward course, irrespective of applause or of censure, and should cling to the right because of its own merits."—*Ibid.*

Not to Be Careless in Appearance

Some Christians argue that the matter of how a Christian looks and dresses is of little import. But God takes a different view. "Christians are in no case to be careless or indifferent in regard to their outward appearance. They are to be neat and trim, though without adornment. They are to be pure inside and out. . . . Truth never makes men or women coarse, or rough, or uncourteous. It takes men in all their sin and commonness, separates them from the world, and refines their taste, even if they are poor and uneducated. Under Christ's discipline, a constant work of refinement goes on, sanctifying them through the truth."—Ellen G. White letter 26, 1900.

This statement strikes directly across the path of those who feel that Christianity has nothing to say regarding unwashed bodies; slovenly clothing; long, unkempt, uncombed, dirty hair; ungroomed beards. Just as God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden "to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15), so He expects His children to care for their bodies. Gardens were not meant to be overrun with weeds.

Neither are bodies. Hair is to be cut, whiskers are to be shaved or trimmed, nails are to be manicured.

Right here we wish to say something about the current trend in the Western world toward a unisex society. Some people are amused over the fact that one cannot always be sure whether a motorcycle rider with long hair flowing out from under his helmet, is a boy or girl, or whether the two young people walking down the sidewalk together are both boys, both girls, or one of each. We do not think it is funny. God intended that there should be a sharp distinction between the appearance of men and women. This is plain in Deuteronomy 22:5: "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God." It may be argued that this text merely forbids wearing the garb of the opposite sex for purposes of immorality. That this is involved is beyond question. But there is a principle here that may be given a broader application.

"God Pronounces It Abomination"

Sister White applies this principle to the practice of minimizing the difference between the clothing of men and women. At one time she commented: "There is an increasing tendency to have women in their dress and appearance as near like the other sex as possible, and to fashion their dress very much like that of men, but God pronounces it abomination."—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 457.

"God designed that there should be a plain distinction between the dress of men and women, and has considered the matter of sufficient importance to give explicit directions in regard to it; for the same dress worn by both sexes would cause confusion and great increase of crime. Were the apostle Paul alive, and should he behold women professing godliness with this style of dress, he would utter a rebuke."—*Ibid.*, p. 460. Does it take much imagination to conclude that the apostle Paul would condemn current styles that tend to reduce the "plain distinction between the dress of men and women"?

We return to the concept of maturity. The gifts of the Spirit were provided, in part at least, to enable God's sons and daughters to grow up—not merely physically, but mentally, emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Called as a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people," members of the remnant church are to "shew forth the praises of him who hath called . . . [them] out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). If the time is here for the church to reveal to the world what God can do for lost humanity, can we doubt that the time is here for Christian maturity in all aspects of individual and denominational life?

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