

Whatever Happened to Sunday's Best?

(A Study on Reverence in God's House)

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Psalm 89:7 says:

"God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him."

Some Christians in various churches across the land are wondering what happened to those old and bygone days when people would come to church dressed in their Sunday best. There are many marketing techniques used by "business preachers" today who are trying to lure people into their churches through downplaying dress and the whole principle of respect and reverence for God's house. The church is viewed as a shopping center where people can pick and choose what they like (2 Timothy 4:3). And it seems to be the job of the preacher these days to give the people what they like.

Ministers are announcing over the radio and writing in their church promotional materials that people are welcome to come to their church in a relaxed atmosphere without dressing differently than they would normally dress during the week. They are told that the old hymns will not be sung because of a new contemporary approach to worship that is being adopted by the church. They advertise about their drama teams and other Hollywood theatrics in order to draw people in under their lights and create an exciting atmosphere far away from the usual and normal church standards. This is a sad but true reality. And all of these manmade marketing techniques of today have created a lack of reverence for God's house.

There seems to be an all-out-war going on today between new church methods and the old traditional standards that have long represented decency and respect for church meetings. If anyone wants to teach a young convert about the matter of dress and reverence for God's house or the stated church meetings, he is termed a legalist of the worst sort. Of course, dressing respectfully for God's house on God's Day (Sunday) does not make you a legalist

unless you think that dressing a certain way will give you acceptance or salvation before God or make you spiritual in your Christian life.

What is reverence anyway? Webster defines reverence like this:

1. A feeling or attitude of deep respect tinged with awe; veneration (to treat with reverence) 2. The outward manifestation of this feeling.

Both the Hebrew and Greek concepts behind the word reverence would support this basic idea or definition. In the Hebrew (yare') and Greek (deos) languages reverence denotes a sense of godly fear or overwhelming sense of awe toward God. It points to a deep respect and bashfulness or shamefacedness before God's holiness. This of course begins with an inward attitude of heart but out of necessity this inward heart attitude will translate itself to our outward expressions in worship such as singing, music, preaching and even dress. Reverence is an inward attitude of worship, which is reflected in our outward conduct and actions. Reverence is demonstrated toward God by the outward manifestation of our conduct and actions

It's interesting to note that the very core definition of reverence is opposite of worldly showmanship and entertainment. These seem to be the very things that the church is pushing today as they try to replace reverence in God's house on the Lord's day (Sunday) with all kinds of showy entertainment which according to the church growth experts is nothing more than cultural changes in church life. But the Scriptures conclude that worship is to be done out of the act of godly fear and holiness, which speaks of worshipping God reverently and respectfully or in a way that will magnify, uphold and represent His holy character.

This reverent fear of God is something that is being replaced by man today as he attempts to please his own flesh in the time of worship through fleshly music, entertaining preaching and relaxed dressing. Man wants to promote a type of church service that caters to his own agenda instead of remembering that church is the place where we show deep reverence for the Lord because of His hallowed name (Matt. 6:9). Godly fear or reverence within the church is being replaced by good times, celebration type parties and cheap manmade entertainment. But what does the Scripture say about our corporate times of worship?

Psalm 5:7 says:

“But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear (reverence and respect) will I worship toward thy holy temple.”

Psalm 96:9

“O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear (have reverence and respect) before him, all the earth.”

The element of fear is always to be connected with our worship of God. We see this again and again in the Scriptures. Just reading certain Scriptures will bring us to the inescapable conclusion that we must demonstrate this godly fear or reverence and respect as we worship God corporately as His people.

2 Kings 17:36 says:

“But the LORD, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and a stretched out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship, and to him shall ye do sacrifice.”

In Revelation 14:7 gives this advice to the tribulation world:

“Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.”

Revelation 15:4 reveals what the martyrs of the future tribulation period will say when they are in Heaven:

“Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.”

This idea of reverent and respectful fear before God is always to be part of our corporate worship. You cannot read the Scriptures without coming to these very clear conclusions.

A. W. Tozer said:

“If there is no fear in our hearts, there can be no worship of God.

Reverent fear flows out of our state of wonder and admiration for who God is and what He does. It is the result of contemplating the greatness of God's holiness and majestic person. We must remember that as we come together to worship God as a body of believers on Sunday we are sending a message up to God concerning what we think about Him. The way that we act and dress tells God what we really think about him.

When it comes to reverence the modern church has certainly become lax. A worship service should be characterized as a place of deep reverence toward the great and holy God. This is why the church for so many centuries was reverent in its practice of dress on the Lord's Day. It's because the church understood that God is holy and those who corporately worship Him together on His special day should approach him in a manner that acknowledges His holiness. This requires reverence, respect, order, mannerliness and decorum of dress that honors the God of matchless holiness.

But the 21st century church has created a house and church service of entertainment, sensuous and worldly music, down dressing, entertainment and applause. It has become a Hollywood atmosphere and man-centered place that has absolutely no reverence when it comes to worshipping a holy God. When we ask, "Whatever happened to Sunday's best we are really asking the question, "Whatever happened to reverence?"

Reverence began to be lost in the churches as modern New Evangelicalism made deeper inroads into the church life. There is a great deal of pressure for churches to compete and conform to the newest gyrations and sounds and fads of our day. But we must ask ourselves this question: "What is more important – reverence or so-called cultural changes?" We must remember that our changing culture becomes irrelevant in our time of worship. Do you know why? It's because culture has nothing to do with true worship! Culture centers on man but worship is to be centered on God. So we are not to bring into the church the latest cultural changes or fads and deem them as necessary parts for genuine worship to occur or take place.

Respect is a companion word to reverence, which must be maintained in our time of worship. Respect is also demonstrated by

our attitudes and appearance. It is outwardly demonstrating in a formal way personal honor, appreciation and esteem toward God. We have forgotten that the gathering together of believers for worship is a hallowed occasion when we corporately are saying that this is how we view our great and magnificent God.

When we come together as a company of believers we are sending a message up to God. We are saying, "This is what we think of You (God) and this is how we want to act before You (God) and this is the message we want to convey to You as our God."

Today the well-known saying by many preachers who have lost sight of God's holiness and reverence or respect for God's house is this: "Come as you are." They will then go on to say, "Wear your old clothing that you mow the yard with and just come as you are. God will accept you the way that you are. So just come on in and wear your old jeans if you want to and come into the Lord's house to celebrate Jesus."

I am appalled at the disrespectful way that Christians attempt to worship the God of flawless holiness and how they haphazardly present themselves before the God of the universe and Creator of the world on His established day of worship. I am ashamed at how many Christians today treat so lightly the God who made the prophet's fall before Him as dead men and which told Moses to take off His shoes because of His holiness. I am ashamed that preachers now think God is not worth more than a pair of old blue jeans or T-shirt that reads "Do the Dew" or "Go Dallas Cowboys." I was driving along the other day in my car and saw that one particular church in town had advertised on their billboard – "T-shirt Sunday!"

Now I want to say several things today that may offend some people and will certainly denounce what is going on in many churches today which have been deceived and duped by such a mentality as this. But I make no apologies for saying it. First, let me say that God is holy. And a holy God before whom the angels cover their faces and before whom all of Heaven bows and sings and before whom the prophets fell as dead men is worth more than just "Come as you are."

Isaiah 6:1-5

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”

When we see the King in all of His holiness we will reverence Him and not shame Him through selfish and carnal acts of worship.

A.W. Tozer said:

“But a man who has passed through the veil and looked even briefly upon the holy place of Isaiah’s God can never be irreverent again.”

Exodus 3:2-5 says:

“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

Exodus 19:16

“And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.”

Both Isaiah and Moses understood about the awesome nature of God’s holiness in a way that we might never understand or grasp in our own time. And yet we must learn to grow in our understanding of the holiness of God. Somehow we must hear the thundering voice of God and see the smoke and fiery brilliance coming from the altar so

that we might have a confrontation with the God of matchless holiness. And in return we must learn to respect Him with reverent fear even in the way that we dress when we corporately meet together as God's people to demonstrate our reverence toward God.

Acts 20:7 says:

“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on themorrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”

Revelation 1:10

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.”

Let us remember that Sunday is the churches corporate statement of what they think about God when they gather together to worship Him. It is the “Lord's day” and is to be a special day in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ (John 20:1) where we demonstrate our reverence and respect to Him in all of our actions of worship – both inward as well as outward. Sunday is not to be a statement of irreverence or lack of interest concerning how we approach a holy God but a day (the Lord's day) where we show deep reverence to Him as the eternal God of infinite holiness and untold majesty.

These money-hungry and people-pleasing preachers of today are spitting a holy God in the face when they tell people to come to church any old way that they please. It's our responsibility as preachers to uphold reverence and respect for God's house and teach these principles to our people. Some of these preachers today have simply lost sight of who God is and as a result are promoting disrespect in God's own house on every level today. Preachers have lost sight of the fact that Sunday is the very day that God has called His church to corporately worship Him with deep respect and reverence. Preachers are using marketing techniques today in order to get people to flock to their churches so they can keep up with the Jones' church down the street.

I believe that if more preachers today would see God for who He is in all of His splendor and holiness and see the smoke and brilliant light as Isaiah saw it coming from the throne room of God and feel the

shaking of the mountain as Moses and the people did, then they would recant all of their statements which encourage people to come to church any old way that they want to. They would plead with their people to think more seriously about God instead of themselves when they come to church! Whatever happened to respect for God's house?

Whatever happened to dressed in your Sunday best? I'll tell you what happened. First, we have given into the culture of our day and the mentality that man must please himself in some way when he comes to church. We are losing focus on God and placing our focus on man in our worship today. We are attempting to get man to worship God without respect and reverence for His house. This is an absolute travesty that is occurring in the modern church!

Second, our attitudes and appearance are very important when we come into God's house. God is concerned about appearance when His people come together to corporately worship Him. I remember reading an account in the Old Testament in regards to dress, which teaches an important lesson for our lives today.

Zephaniah 1:8

"And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD'S sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel."

Josiah's sons evidenced their disobedience to God by wearing the latest fashions from Nineveh and Babylon (foreign clothes). The way they dressed demonstrated their inward heart attitude toward God. Dress reflects our attitude toward God. Clothes communicate our attitude toward our activities and what they mean to us. In this case, adopting the foreign dress outwardly, most likely implied that they also had absorbed foreign values and practices inwardly in their heart. They had adopted the philosophies and value system of the world by the way that they dressed and by this statement they also reflected their true attitude toward God. It was an attitude of defiance, rebellion and disrespect for His Word and truth. Of course this does not mean that every time you buy a new type of shirt or dress that is in fashion that you are worldly. But in this particular case the way that the people dressed sent a very clear message to Zephaniah that their

hearts were in the wicked system instead of following God's way for their lives.

I believe that there are several applications of this Biblical account to our lives today. First, the way we dress and maintain our bodies is important. It can reflect our inward heart attitude toward God which can be either rebellion or obedience, respect or reverence. The hippie moment of the past was all an act of rebellion against authority, which was actually God's authority. And even today men with long hair rebel against God's authority and design (1 Cor. 11:14). In like manner, when we come to church any old way that we like and forget about how great and holy God is then our dress can clearly reflect that attitude. It's an attitude of disrespect before God. Why are people coming to churches today wearing superman T-shirts, shorts and other attire that has always been deemed inappropriate for God's holy house? It's because we have a wrong attitude toward God! We have lost sight of a holy God who is worthy of our best! We have not been reminded by modern New Evangelicalism that God is so holy that He is deserving of our best dress.

I'm afraid that many Christians are beginning to be clothed in a lot of "strange apparel" in our present day when it comes to attending church. And it's all because we have lost sight of God and how infinitely holy He is! The way that we dress when we come to church does reflect our attitude toward God. Second, I want to say that the way we dress in our everyday lives does reflect what we think about God and His Word. It also reflects whether or not we are being sucked into the system of the world.

For instance, when I must wear immodest apparel in order to fit with the crowd at school then I have become worldly in my apparel (1 Timothy 2:9). And when I must buy the newest thing all the time just to keep up with the rest and feel accepted by the majority of the world then the apparel or clothing that I wear has become worldly to me. It becomes the lust of the flesh and the pride of life in my heart (1 John 2:15-17). God's Word also warns against excesses of display and the driving need to become like other people for show and acceptance (1 Peter 3:3). When I must wear the latest fashion to keep up with others and feel accepted then that apparel becomes "strange apparel" according to God's viewpoint (Zephaniah 1:8).

You may say today, Preacher, you are trying to find a needle in a haystack.” No, I am trying to preach the whole counsel of God’s Word that calls for respect and reverence before a holy God both in our everyday dress and church attire. Friend, we are trying to maintain a holy standard for God these days in the midst of much distorted thinking and disrespectful actions. There are those sincere believers today who are still searching for churches that maintain some decency and respect and they wonder why they are becoming smaller in number. It’s because preachers don’t care about God’s holiness anymore. They only care about filling their churches and getting that extra one hundred dollars in the offering plate. And to do this they are offering many “strange things” as marketing techniques and as part of their worship program.

Hebrews 12:28 reminds us:

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

Let me say today that we need to have a heart that is in tune with the God who is flawlessly holy. It’s a heart that directs us to blush before His presence and hang our heads in shame. But at the same time, it’s a heart that possesses great wonder and admiration for who God is in all of His righteous and holy character. When we have this kind of humility and respect before God then we will not have any second thoughts about wearing our Sunday best when we come to church. In fact, we will not have any second thoughts about submitting to a standard or code of conduct designed to promote unity and love toward one another in an assembly and respect for God’s holiness (Gal. 5:13).

I have had people tell me that they will go to church anyway that they choose. But I know that when people say this they have become blind-sighted by the modern day mentality, which has forgotten to reverence and respect God. I know that they have in some measure lost sight of a holy God since their attitude of dress is unimportant. They send the message up to God that He must accept them in the manner that they decide to come to church. Oh how different their attitude would be and their dress would be if they would respect and

reverence God for who He is and how terrible and awesome His presence is. God is worthy of our respect in every way, even the way that we dress on His special day of worship!

By the way, it is not a matter of God accepting you or not accepting you when you come to church dressed in a certain manner. If you are truly born again God has already accepted you in the “beloved” or in the person of His own Son (Eph. 1:3-6). The point of coming to church in a certain type of clothing has nothing to do with God accepting you as His child. What we are talking about is your attitude toward God! God will most certainly forever accept you as His child in the person of His Son.

But I wonder if God has been pleased with your attitude of disrespect toward Him? Is God really pleased with that attitude which says, “God, here I am, take me or don’t take me.” Doesn’t the infinitely holy and eternal God that caused Isaiah and John to fall before His presence as dead men deserve a more respectful attitude than this? God deserves an attitude of reverence that will translate itself into a respectful way of dress on His day of worship. If we knowingly intend to break traditional standards of respect in regards to church attire, one must wonder if our hearts are really reverencing God, as we should.

Of course there is a difference in certain cultural settings in relationship to dress and worshipping God. Any missionary will verify this. But even these cultures must maintain decency and respect in their manner of dress in order to follow the Biblical principles of respect and reverence toward God’s holiness and His house. However, to use an African culture of dress as a guideline for American Sunday dress is unacceptable. To knowingly break established patterns of worship that have long represented decency and respect in the United States and which were foundational to American reverence for God is showing disrespect toward God. It is promoting an attitude of irreverence toward God in corporate worship right here in our own American backyard.

Let’s stop trying to find loopholes to do our own thing in the church and forget about the whole matter of decency and respect in God’s house. I’m tired of men and ministries who have systematically been

trying to strip the churches in America of decency and reverence for God all in the name of freedom in Christ. The New Evangelical TV ministries love to put the camera on men who have long hair hanging down their backs or who have their hair in a ponytail in order to stress a point to the TV audience. The point that they want to make is this. It does not matter what we look like before God or whether or not we follow God's design for manhood as long as our heart is right. Well, a man who knowingly rejects God's word about long hair does not have an obedient heart and is certainly being disrespectful to God and rebellious (1 Cor. 11:14). You can also be absolutely sure that our freedom in Christ cannot be passed off as liberty to commit acts of disobedience toward God and His word. In fact, our obedience to God demonstrates deep reverence for Him and the outward show of respect and decency to His feminine and masculine designs.

Many over the years have used that familiar verse in 1 Samuel 16:7 to try and argue for a more relaxed and open way to dress in God's house. The verse says: "But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."

This verse has been used as some kind of scapegoat mechanism to ignore the principles of respect and decency in God's house. It's amazing how people will try to use the Bible to condone their own act of indecency and disrespect before God! Of course, this verse has a totally different emphasis on outward appearance than dress. In fact, it does not even speak of the clothing that is actually worn on the outward body. It speaks of a person's God-given stature or their outward body. To look down upon the practice of respectful dress for church attendance because of what God told Samuel is a wrong application of this text of Scripture.

God had told Samuel that He had rejected Saul as the king that was to reign over Israel (1 Sam. 16:1). As Samuel was looking for a mighty and handsome man God reminds Samuel that the outward appearance, meaning the countenance of a man – his body, looks and charm, mean nothing to God in relationship to the heart of a king. And God was looking for a man of His own choosing (1 Samuel 13:14). The point is this. God is more concerned with the king's heart

than with his stature. This was especially true since God wanted a man who truly would seek God's ways and will for the nation. This statement has to do with the countenance and over all looks of a person in relationship to his physical body or stature.

1 Samuel 16:12

"And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he."

The primary emphasis of this passage has nothing to do with how we present ourselves before the Lord in dress when we come to church. The text says nothing about reverence or respect for God when we come to church. It has to do with a godly king ruling over his people. Therefore, to use it as a scapegoat for Christians to become disrespectful before the Lord in their Sunday dress is a wrong application of the verse.

This is not to say that we should bypass an important principle for our times of corporate worship. We already know that God's heart is pleased as we demonstrate respect before Him in our dress as we corporately meet together on His day. But it is equally true that our heart must be pure and be given to God in sincere worship as well. Let us not miss this valid principle. We might dress to the hilt when we come to church but have a heart that is far from God.

Jesus said in Matthew 15:8:

"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."

In any event, we should not use a verse such as 1 Samuel 16:7 and apply it to the modern day practice of disrespecting God by the way that we fail to dress when coming to church just because God is said to look on the heart. No verse in the Bible should ever be used to demote respect and reverence for God's holiness. We must grab hold of the principle which is this. We need to have a pure and prepared heart in whatever we do, whether its ruling as a king, doing some ministry for the Lord or even worshipping God on Sunday. But we must not lose sight of how the heart's attitude of reverence toward God's holiness is also reflected in the way that we dress when

coming to worship God on Sunday. And somehow our dress can reflect that we have a prepared heart.

God was simply reminding Samuel that he must also be concerned about the inward heart of a person instead of merely their outward stature. But God never said that He despised the outward part of man when it comes to worshipping or reverencing Him. This is because the context has nothing to do with worship toward God. God was deeply concerned with the way that the high priests dressed as they came into His holy presence (Exodus 28). Although the dress of the high priests had a typical meaning under the law it also sent the message that God was concerned about respect and reverence as people came into His presence and worshipped Him as a representative for the nation. You can be sure that they were not wearing their old blue jeans when they came into God's presence. I say again, let's not abuse the text in 1 Samuel 16:7 and use it to become one-sided in our approach to worship where we attempt to worship at the expense of reverence.

The point seems to be that we should not neglect the inward heart at the expense of only looking at the outward. A smiling face or outward charisma does not represent godliness. This is because God looks on the inward heart of purity and sincerity. This is the lesson we need to learn. However, we must learn not to apply a principle from one verse at the expense of a principle from another verse. Balance is necessary. God is looking for a heart of purity and an outward display of reverence. Both are important to God. And the way that we outwardly dress reflects our inward heart of reverence toward God.

Yes, God looks on the heart and I wonder what God sees when He looks upon our hearts. Does He see a heart that is ready to reverence Him? Yes, God looks on the heart but how do we look at God today? Do we see Him as the great and holy God who is to be revered? Do we see the bush burning as Moses did when he encountered the holiness of God? Can we in some measure get back to seeing God as Isaiah did in Isaiah chapter six? Isaiah saw the smoke ascending from the presence of God's throne and felt the shaking all about him and he knew that God was so infinitely holy that he fell before His presence in humility and reverence.

Another verse that is commonly used to try and promote the present day relaxed dress in the church is what Jesus said in John 7:24: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

In this context Jesus was not speaking about the appearance of dress but the outward appearance of actions, as they have to do with working on the Sabbath day of Israel. Jesus was accused by the religious Jews that he actually worked on the Sabbath just because he healed a man. Can you imagine someone accusing Jesus of breaking the law just because he healed a man! The fact of the matter is this. Jesus did not work on the Sabbath day just because he healed a man. They were judging improperly and not in a righteous manner because they did not know the Scriptures. The law never said that it was wrong to heal someone on the Sabbath, help save someone's animal or pick some corn to eat on the Sabbath day. If any judging is to be done it must be done in a proper manner based upon the law or the Word of God.

As you can see, this passage has no application to the manner of dress in God's house which is simply another way we worship God by showing respect and reverence to Him. How sad when these texts become pretexts and are wrongly interpreted and applied to demote honoring God through our dress. The church today needs to start reprogramming her mind and get back to a worship that is filled with deep reverence and respect for God which will be reflected in all of her actions, songs, dress and teaching.

I remember talking to a preacher who pastored a large church in southern Florida. One day some member invited an entire baseball team to the church service. As they came into the church every member of that team wore their baseball hats. And these baseball players wore their hats the entire service showing great disrespect for God's house. After the service the pastor remarked to several of the men that these fellows, out of respect for God's house and reverence for the most holy and high God of Heaven, should have removed their hats when they came into the service. The next day a man came into the office of the pastor in a fit of rage and said something to this effect. "If you ever suggest that a baseball team should remove their hats in a church service again I'm going to punch you right in the

nose!” Can you imagine how out of line this brother was to react to a pastor in this way who was trying to uphold dignity for God in the holy place of worship?

We have become blinded by New Evangelicalism today which is pushing for irreverence and disrespect in God’s house by demoting dress as legalism and unimportant and promoting rock music, Hollywood films, entertainment icons, the praise of man, pop psychology and just about everything imaginable. I heard that in some charismatic worship meetings they are actually having gold fillings magically appear in their teeth and claim that this is a work of the Lord. And there is now a magical glory gold dust being miraculously sprinkled over their faces. Their claim is that this is a first stage of some latter-day miracle outpouring. How irreverent and full of nonsense all of this type of thing really is before the holy God of Heaven. Can you even imagine what God thinks about all of the disrespect going in the name of Christ today?

The church has lost sight of who God is and they are trying to worship God through their own created manmade idols and their own atmosphere of feelings. I think many people today are worshipping their feelings and distorted pictures of God instead of really worshipping God. Of course, all of this results in a lack of reverence toward God. If we attempt to worship God through our own religious idols, we cannot truly reverence God.

In other words, many come to church in order to worship God but in reality, they are only getting a feeling that suits their so-called style of music and certain mood and are not really directing their heart to God in worship. Rather, they are directing their heart to their feelings and particular mood and miss out on the joy of true worship. In short, Christians can go through the feelings and moods of a church service but never really worship God. All of their attention can very easily be directed to a certain beat, sound, or atmosphere instead of being directed to God. This is what I call artificial worship. And within the modern-day church atmosphere there is much that is being passed off as worship which is simply a feast of the flesh and an opportunity to “party for Jesus” by engaging in disrespectful worldly music.

For many people worship is simply the creation of an atmosphere of feelings produced by some specific sound or gyrations. The end result is that a certain type of music and our own feelings can become what we worship instead of God. Furthermore, in this type of atmosphere disrespect and irreverence is lost in God's house due to the manmade worship, cheap novelty and worldly entertainment.

Psalm 89:7 is our eternal reminder:

"God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him."

Psalm 111:9 also states:

"He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name."

Six-year-old Angie and her four-year-old brother Joel were sitting together in church. Joel giggled, sang, and talked out loud. Finally, his big sister had had enough. "You're not supposed to talk out loud in church." "Why? Who's going to stop me?" Joel asked. Angie pointed to the back of the church and said, "See those two men standing by the door? They're called hushers."

We need more hushers in the church today. Hushers are people who realize that reverence is an important or integral part of our worship before the Lord. And today's churches should return to reverence even in the way that they dress as they meet for corporate worship. Our outward dress in "Sunday's best" is still a way to demonstrate our respectful worship before God on His special day that He has given for the Christian Church – Sunday. The outward becomes a reflection of the inward attitude of reverence toward God.

It is true that what we wear to church is not of the greatest importance to God. What is most important to God is that we have a heart that is open to worship Him in sincerity. God wants us to possess a genuine heart that is free from sinful hypocrisy or phony religious pretense. Our worship should not be simply geared around a place, ceremony, particular type of dress or certain repetitive practice. It must come from a heart that is ready to give to God without necessarily receiving anything from God in return.

Jesus said in John 4:24:

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

The word “spirit” points to the place where we worship God whereas the word “truth” can point to worship that reflects God’s standard of truth (Biblical worship) but also worship that points to the sincerity behind our act of worship. The two must work hand in hand and form a couplet in our understanding of sincere or honest worship on the inside of our hearts. The idea of the prepositional phrase “in truth” points to personal excellence. It is that candor of mind, which is free from pretence, falsehood or deceit. The idea of being “in truth” as related to the inner spirit of man (“in spirit”) seems to suggest that the word “truth” is pointing to the inner character of a person’s life (truthfulness or sincerity). The word in the context seems to connote that we must be open and honest with God in our inner spirit as we worship Him. There must be no sham or hypocrisy in our lives when we worship God. There must be no pretense to being religious, when inwardly our lives are corrupt or sinful. Our lives must be free from sin and all fleshly goals as we worship God.

Now we all know that the act of worship involves outward formalities. We know this is true because we see from the Bible that worship involves meditation, prayer, singing, praising God, reading God’s Word, giving our money and praising His name. All worship involves a certain amount of formality. You can’t get away from this. And this is true of any worship service. We dress, sing and study God’s Word in reverence and have many outward formalities that we go through but the fact of the matter is this. Real worship takes place on the inside of a person’s spirit where he can communicate to God from a sincere or non-hypocritical heart. You can pass through all of the outward formalities which in and of themselves can be part of your worship directed toward God. But if you fail to sincerely communicate to Him from the inside of your spirit then you have missed what real worship is all about.

God is not chiding us for having proper outward forms of worship and expression to Him. He is not scolding us for wearing respectful clothing to church to reverence Him. Nor is he chiding us for worshipping Him in a given location for He clearly said that the Jews

worshiped God in the right location (John 4:22). There is a right place to worship and I might add that there is a right way to worship God. It involves decency, order and decorum (1 Cor. 14:33, 40). But what Jesus is reminding this woman about and each one of us today is that true worship in itself does not revolve around a certain outward location such as Mount Gerezim, the temple in Jerusalem or your home church! True worship does not necessarily have to take place in a certain locality in order for it to be worship. It can take place anywhere since we have God's temple or presence residing within us!

I'm glad that I don't have to put on my suit and tie and come to church every time that I want to pray to God and worship Him. I'm certainly not downgrading our need to reverence God on His special day (Sunday) when we corporately worship together. But isn't it wonderful to realize that God is living within you and that you do not need to come inside a church building in order to pray to God and have fellowship with Him? Do you know why? It's because church is on the inside of you! This is what Jesus meant when He said we worship God from the inside of our spirit ("in spirit"). By way of application, we can say that true worship should never be thought of as simply an outward show of dress, sounds, and particular sights. It must be done within the realm of our spirit where we open our heart and affections to God and bow before Him in reverence.

Carl Laney said:

"Worship has more to do with the state of the heart than with the state of art."

In other words, God is not interested in our dress, our hymnology, our reading of Scripture, our praying, our singing or our giving of money if we are not allowing our spirit to be touched on the inside concerning who God is and what He is doing in our lives. If we are not allowing our inward man or spirit to worship God with deep affection, surrender, purity, openness and sincerity then you might as well take off your suit coat and high top black dress shoes and go home from church. Do you know why? It's because church is on the inside of you! And true or sincere worship must take place on the inside ("in spirit") in order for your outward display of physical formalities to have any meaning attached to them.

Do you realize that you can write your church check and throw it into the offering plate as it goes by and really not be giving to God? We can give financially in an outward manner and really not be inwardly giving ourselves to God in worship. We can go through the rituals of outward dress and singing but miss the real sincere worship that gives back to God from the inside of our heart or spirit without any false pretence or sin. Since God has touched our human spirit with the new life and the presence of the Holy Spirit we can have the overwhelming desire to worship God and have this deepening hunger to open our hearts to Him. My friend, is your heart really open to God these days?

We might also add that when our heart or inward attitude is truly sincere about reverencing God, then our Sunday dress on the Lord's Day will begin to reflect this inward reverence and respect that we have toward God. Our dress can become a beautiful way to express our heart of reverence before the majesty of God's holiness.

In the midst of this changing tide that is occurring in the church today we must ask ourselves, "Have we gone too far?" Have we stepped outside the boundary of reverence for God's absolute majestic holiness and purity? And we must also ask ourselves, "Isn't God worth more than a pair of old Blue Jeans? Isn't God worth more than a "T-shirt Sunday?"

I might conclude this study by sharing some fitting words, which I stumbled upon while reading. This little saying that I am going to share with you demonstrates what is most important to God (the heart). But at the same time it maintains the concept that a heart of sincere reverence will overflow with outward expressions of worship to God, one of them being our respectful dress in the Lord's house on Sunday.

**"God does not care
What we wear to church
(in comparison to the heart)
But what we wear
(our outward dress on Sunday)
Says something
about how we care."**

This little saying seems to maintain the Biblical balance of God viewing the heart as the most important part of worship. And at the same time it expresses the truth that we should demonstrate how much we care about God by reverencing Him in our manner of dress and all of our aspects of corporate worship.

It's true that God wants a heart that is pure, obedient and free from all hypocrisy. Who can deny this important truth?

Psalm 66:18 says:

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

God will not honor any of our outward forms of worship when our heart is not right before Him. This can be seen all throughout the Scriptures.

In Amos 5:21 God said through the prophet:

"I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies."

The heart must be clean and right before God in order for God to accept our worship. If we knowingly have sin in our hearts before God then we will be worshipping in a disobedient manner and be offering up to God "strange fire" upon the alter.

Leviticus 10:1 says:

"And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not."

God wants a pure, obedient and heart that is sincere in worship. All this is true. But at the same time let us not forget that our dress and all that we do in our outward time of corporate worship is an important way to express how much we respect God and care for Him. Our corporate dress, singing and teaching all reflect our true inward attitude toward God. It reflects our sincere attitude of reverence toward God and our desire to demonstrate deep respect toward His majestic name and glorious holiness. The appearance (how we look) and the attitude (how we think) go hand in hand. Our attire on the Lord's Day sends a message to the Lord and those around us of our

inner thinking and feelings toward God. How we think shows up in how we act and how we look!

Here are some questions to reflect upon in view of this study.

- What is most important to God in our times of worship?
- Is God concerned about obedience and purity when we worship Him?
- Why do we reverence God?
- Name some ways that your inward heart attitude of reverence toward God can be outwardly manifested when you attend church?
- How do you dress when you attend church? Does it really demonstrate modesty, decency and reverence toward God?
- What kind of message are you sending up to God and to others by the way that you dress?
- Do you attend church with the attitude which says, “God, you must accept me for what I am when I come to church” or do you say, “God, I want to reverence you in all that I do as I attend church on the Lord’s Day?”
- Do you come to church with the attitude to reverence Him in every way that you possibly can – singing, ushering, teaching, learning, order, decorum and dress?
- Is your inward heart attitude of reverence toward God evidenced by your respectful dress for the Lord on His special day of worship?
- Are you willing to change your outward appearance on the Lord’s Day to demonstrate greater reverence toward Him?

- Have we been setting a good example of reverence for our children and the future generations of the church?
- Are we expressing by our dress how holy God is and how we need to honor and respect Him in our corporate gatherings on the Lord's Day?

Beware lest we have learned to go to church lacking reverence for God and have come to look upon it as the natural and expected practice! Don't be lulled to sleep by the ever-present lack of reverence for God's House today. God is still holy and we should demonstrate reverence and respect for His name and House. This week when you go to church you are saying, "God, this is what I think of You."