

What Should I Wear?

Introduction to the topic:

The Bible speaks on every issue in life, either directly (such as giving us commands and statements) or indirectly (such as teaching us values) – and the issue of clothing is no exception. In fact, the problem isn't the *lack* of information in the Bible, but (more often than not) people's unwillingness to pay attention to what it says.

This study is limited to the general concept of wearing clothes (the noun) or of "putting on" something (the verb), as found in the New Testament. (Specific items of clothing are not included, unless they are found in the context of the verb.) The Old Testament also has much to say on the topic. (The book of Proverbs is a good place to look.)

The issue of clothing is related to many other issues, either directly or indirectly; and though they aren't the focus of this study, they are also important and must influence the way we live and what we wear. A few of these issues include:

- *The issue of modesty*: What we wear *does* have an influence on other people; and God will hold us accountable if we dress in a way that *encourages* them to sin in thought or deed.
- *The issue of prejudice*: If we judge others based on the clothes they wear, we are sinning against them and against the God who made them.
- *The issue of authority*: When we are under someone's authority, they may have the right to influence the way we dress – during the time we are under their authority, and as long as they are not encouraging us to sin. Children and employees (among others) should take this into consideration!

Why wear clothes?

A brief comment will be made about the reason we need clothes. God created the physical world in such a way that it would reflect many truths about spiritual realities. (An example is the use of concepts such as "light" and "darkness" to show the contrast between truth and error, good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, etc.) When we, the human race, sinned, nakedness took on a significance it didn't have before that. We are now spiritually naked and corrupt with sin... and in desperate need of being clothed with a righteousness we can get only from God. Our physical use of clothing is not only a reflection of this spiritual reality, but also helps to restrain (at least in part) some of the physical expressions of the sin that has become a part of our nature.

Because God designed the physical to teach us about the spiritual (guided by Scripture, since our minds are now corrupted by sin), *both* concepts are mentioned in the New Testament. This being the case, we will start with the Scripture references about wearing *physical* clothes, and then look at the spiritual issues.

The "physical" side of this concept

We cannot always separate the physical and spiritual concepts, but these verses at least start with a greater focus on physical clothing – even though spiritual issues are sometimes implied.

A description of the clothes people wore

For the most part, the Bible does not focus a need to wear specific styles of clothes, for that is not the issue. There were some ceremonial or symbolic issues that were important to Israel, under the Old Covenant; but that era is over. (We can learn spiritual truths from what they were required to wear, but we are not under obligation to dress like they did.)

In the following verses (descriptive statements about clothing), a wide range of clothing styles is described. Yet there really isn't much mention of the typical clothing that the average person would wear in everyday situations. That in itself should teach us something – and perhaps we will understand it better when we look at the New Testament *commands* about what we should wear.

1. What did the demon-possessed man wear? Luke 8:27

This didn't *always* happen when a demon took over a person; but in this instance it did. And what the man did after the demons left is quite significant – v. 35.

2. What did John the Baptizer wear? Matthew 3:4; Mark 1:6

This probably had a significance that was related to his function as a prophet. Yet it also stood in stark contrast to those who (from the world's perspective) were rich and influential – Matthew 11:8; Luke 7:25.

3. Clothes of the rich and influential – what are some examples of the type of clothing they wore? Luke 16:19; Acts 12:21

If we read the paragraphs that follow these specific verses (Luke 16:19-31; Acts 12:21-23), we will discover that these are striking examples of a very important fact: One's clothing does not necessarily tell us anything about one's character! The world lies to us – and we must reject this lie.

4. Some of the clothes Jesus wore – just before his crucifixion and now

- During his trial - Matthew 27:31 (see v. 28); Mark 15:17, 20
- His appearance today – Revelation 1:13 (Read the entire passage – v. 12-16. this is not some type of "religious talk," but an attempt to accurately describe what he looks like.)

Throughout Jesus' life, it seems that he wore clothes that were typical for a poor or "average" person. He lived among people as a servant, rather than as a ruler. Yet before his crucifixion, his enemies dressed him in royal robes – but only for the purpose of mocking him. The next time they see him, at the Day of Justice, he will also be wearing royal clothes... but they won't be mocking him any more!

5. The clothes of heavenly beings

- The angel who rolled away the stone at Jesus' tomb – Matthew 28:3 (Note the natural response of those who saw him – verse 4.)
- The angels who bring the seven last plagues of judgment (end times events) – Revelation 15:6
- The armies of heaven, who come to judge the earth – Revelation 19:14

This gives us a glimpse of what we can look forward to, if we are followers of Jesus. We will also be dressed this way. The most wonderful part of it is not the physical appearance of the clothes, but the fact that the spiritual realities they reflect are actually true of us!

Clothes used to symbolize or teach something (such as in a story)

As already implied in some of the above verses, clothes are sometimes used to symbolize something, such as honor, wealth or royalty. The following two passages illustrate instances in which specific types of clothing were given (or expected) because of what they signified.

Note that there is a difference between wearing a specific type of clothing to symbolize something, and judging other people (discrimination or favoritism) based on what they wear. This second practice is expressly forbidden in Scripture! See James 2:1-13. (Note: A person may choose to wear a certain type of clothing as an expression of sinful values, and we may have a legitimate reason to oppose him for doing so. Yet opposing his *values* must be our primary focus, rather than the clothing itself. If we manage to get the person to change his external appearance without a change in his heart, we haven't really accomplished anything beneficial!)

Because of the symbolism, some types of clothing may be appropriate for certain situations and less appropriate for others.

1. What type of clothing was given to the prodigal (wasteful) son? What did these clothes symbolize? Luke 15:22
2. What type of clothing was required at the wedding? What did these clothes symbolize? Matthew 22:11-12

In this situation, the host (the *king*) probably supplied the guests with the needed wedding clothes. So the guest's unwillingness or refusal to wear them was a serious matter – especially since it reflected the person's attitude toward the king!

In this sinful world, the symbolism doesn't always match the reality. Wicked people can wear nice-looking clothes! Even symbolically, we can use the clothing concept to describe a person who hides his true nature.

3. What type of "clothing" is mentioned in this passage, and what does it teach us? Matthew 7:15

Specific commands about clothing and apparel

These passages are not mere *suggestions*. They are *commands* and must be heeded. Since they came from God, our response to them reflects our attitude toward God.

The basic focus of these passages is one of values and priorities, and of trust in God: We must not be preoccupied with what we wear. It seems that most people have a *distorted*

focus; so for them, this simply means, "Stop being preoccupied with clothes and redirect your focus to what God says is more important."

If we *do* have clothes to wear, we should be satisfied. Having a greater preoccupation for what we wear, than for God's kingdom, is a form of idolatry, and a rejection of God's values. We cannot go after the world's values and follow Jesus at the same time.

1. What attitude must we have toward clothing, and why? Matthew 6:25, 28; Luke 12:22-23 (See also the context of these verses.)

These verses also show us that clothing isn't the *only* thing we tend to have a sinful preoccupation with!

2. What values can we learn from the following passage? Mark 6:9 (and context) [Hint: The focus of this passage isn't on the number of clothing articles we can own!]
3. A requirement for women: What must be the primary source of your beauty? 1 Peter 3:3 (also v. 4-5)

Spiritual issues taught by the wearing of clothes

For the most part, the historical books of the New Testament – the gospels, Acts and Revelation (which is history of the *future*) – tend to use the concept of clothing with a more physical emphasis (even when it symbolizes something). The books that focus on teaching us what it means to be a follower of Jesus – such as Paul's epistles – tend to use the concept in a more symbolic way.

Just as we put on *physical* clothes to cover our naked bodies, so also we must "clothe" ourselves with various things, in order to cover our "old selves" (the sinful nature or "spiritual nakedness" we were born with). When people look at our bodies, they see the *physical* clothes that cover us; in the same way, when people look at us as followers of Jesus, there are certain things they must be able to see! This includes the various character qualities that are compatible with the nature of God, which people may be able to observe in our lives. But it also includes things that the world will be less able to understand – things like the power of God and *Jesus Christ himself!*

Most of these verses use the verb form of the word, and may be translated as "putting on" something, or being "clothed" with something.

"Clothed" with Jesus Christ

What should people see, when they look at a follower of Jesus? They should see *Jesus*, not the person's "*old self*"!

1. What happens to all people who are "baptized" into Christ? Galatians 3:27 (Note also the consequences, v. 29.)

This does not refer to baptism by water, but to the spiritual baptism that occurs when a person becomes a follower of Jesus (Romans 6). This is the first of many changes that occur when God saves a person. Water baptism was intended to symbolize this event... but even fakes – people whose lives remain unchanged – can get water-baptized.

2. Is sin ever an option we can choose? How must we live? Romans 13:14 (For the context, read the entire passage, beginning in verse 8.)

The verse in Galatians focuses on a *fact* that has occurred in those who follow Jesus. This verse in Romans focuses on the ongoing *choice* or *lifestyle* of such a person. (When a genuine follower of Jesus reads a command such as this, he will choose *obedience*. The fakes will often excuse *disobedience*.)

How will a follower of Jesus obey this command? One of the ways described in this passage can be found below, in the section about "Armor."

"Clothed" with Power (the Holy Spirit)

This is *why* the follower of Jesus is able to do what he does.

1. What were the apostles told to wait for? Luke 24:49

Though the specific event referred to (the receiving of the Holy Spirit) occurred a few weeks later (see Acts 2), the Holy Spirit is present in the life of *every* follower of Jesus.

"Putting on" the Armor for the Spiritual "Battle"

Jesus' followers are willing to obey these commands. If you don't do these things, *you* are the loser.

1. What is one of the characteristics of this armor; how is it described? What is it the opposite of? Romans 13:12

See the entire passage, starting in verse 8, to get an idea of how we will live, if we are wearing this armor. Note also the connection between wearing this concept and "putting on" Jesus (v. 14).

2. What are some of the parts of this armor that we are to wear? Why is each part so important? Ephesians 6:11 (See verses 10-18.)

This phrase "put on" also occurs in v. 14; though in some translations, it will just be implied, because of its connection with v. 11.

3. All people either live in darkness or are "sons of light." It's the difference between night and day. What will those who "belong to the day" do, which is different from those who are characterized as "living in darkness"? Why? 1 Thessalonians 5:8 (See also v. 4-11.)

"Putting on" the "New Self" (and the impact it will have on the way we live)

1. One of the basic teachings about life in Christ involves "taking off" one thing and "putting on" another. What must you do? Ephesians 4:24 (v. 22-24)

How can I be saved? How can I know Christ? The apostle Paul tells us that this is the true way (see v. 20-21). It's sad that many "church-goers" never learn this.

2. New followers of Jesus need to *learn* how to live; so the apostle Paul tells them what they must do. But first, something needs taken off and something else needs put on. What are these things? Colossians 3:9-10

In this passage, note that these things are described as having *already* happened in their lives. These people were *genuine* followers of Jesus! Since these things had already happened, they were now capable of following the instructions Paul was giving them.

"Putting on" Godly Character Qualities (which are the consequence of having a "new self")

1. Once a person has become "clothed" with the "new self," what comes next?
Colossians 3:12

Genuine salvation will have its effect on the way we interact with other people. (See also the verses that follow in the context.)

"Putting on" the Consequences of the Resurrection (a future event)

Those who are "clothed" with the things mentioned above can look forward to this:

1. What do we look forward to? 2 Corinthians 5:2-4

In this passage, our present bodies are described as temporary "tents" or "dwelling places," that our spirits live in. Our future hope isn't to be "tentless" (living without a body), but to have this temporary "tent" replaced by a permanent one.

2. What are some of the things that must occur, before this happens? 1 Corinthians 15:53-54

The rest of the passage gives more details about what will happen at that time.