

For the Love of the Family Ministries

Missionaries to America's Forgotten Mission Field, the Family

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Casual Dress, Casual Life By Evangelist Mike Azinger

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If you look up the word "casual" in the Webster's 1828 Dictionary, you will find the phrase, "see [also] Accident." At the scene of *accidents*, you find "casualties." "Casualty," I was told some years ago, has the same root word as "casual." Or, to put it more simply, accidents happen when things are taken casually. Even things like casual attire.

If there is one thing that reveals how far American society has fallen, it is how far our dress standards have fallen. The prostitutes from years ago would blush at the sight of what many of today's grade school and junior high girls wear to class every day. For generations, the Bible was our standard-bearer for how we dressed: modesty and contrast between the sexes were the standards, and these, by their very definition, implied dignity, beauty, and a demand for respect. Tragically, Hollywood and the music industry set our standards for dress today, and their lifestyles represent no limits, which brings - at its end - futility or madness. Look deep in the eyes of your average entertainer: they are empty, hollow, and lost. They are evil and self-loving; and you will see there no fear of God. Yet, most American moms and dads have few qualms about these type of people setting dress standards for their children.

Casual dress, I think, is a symptom of an unserious culture. Casual Friday was as quickly embraced in America as shopping on Sunday - more convenient and more comfortable, thank you, and please don't pester me about what God thinks of it. Many women today dress like, and, therefore, look like men, and many men dress like slobs or like boys. It's no wonder we show little respect for each other: who respects a woman who looks like a man or who respects a grown man who doesn't have enough dignity to dress like a grown man? By nature, we show more respect to people who dress more dignified. By nature, we treat females with more respect when they dress more feminine. By nature, we treat men with more respect when they dress masculine and dignified. I am saying things that used to be self-evident to the average American.

William F. Buckley, in a 1959 article titled "What To Do About Slovenly Dress?" in *National Review* magazine, wrote, "Respectful or respectable dressing is a characteristic of adult society. Some people are born gentlemen, other people acquire gentility during life, still others must have it forced on them."

Good luck. That was 1959. Imagine forcing such rules on this society. As Buckley also said, "Coat-and-tie is merely a symbol. It could be courtesy; deference; reverence; humility; moderation..." Indeed it is. Should we be surprised then, that when we discard the coat and tie et. al. in our society that we find that "courtesy, deference, reverence, and humility" have strangely disappeared also? And they will not return to their previous throne until our standards are elevated to their previous heights.

Can we not make the point from Ephesians 5 (though it is not the primary teaching of the text) that God wants his people sufficiently dressed and even dressed with dignity, by his command for the Christian "to take unto you the *whole* (as in *completely* dressed) armour of God...having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness..."? This is, of course, teaching of spiritual warfare, but I believe you can also make the case that if God dresses you fully for spiritual warfare, he would expect the same in every day life.

We understand, most of us, the principles of modesty and that there is to be a distinction between a man and a woman; which, the greater the distinction, the more dignity it brings to both male and female. Disagree? Then go attend a wedding and tell me I'm wrong. There you will see the bride arrayed in all of her female glory - adorned to the apotheosis of her femininity: bringing glory to God by glorifying her femininity and by making herself beautiful for her husband-to-be. Likewise the man, who dresses to accentuate his masculinity to be as manly as he possibly can be for his new bride, and, whether he intends it or not, bringing glory to God by glorifying his maleness, and each, by contrasting so strongly and so beautifully their corresponding sexes, they glorify God together: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them...and behold, it was very good." (Gen. 1:27,31) God is glorified in contrast; man finds happiness in reflecting God's glory. Most wedding picture frames encase two lovers with big smiles - because they are glorifying God.

In the Old Testament, the high-priests who attended the Temple were commanded to have a specific dress - dignified, ornamental, and metaphoric - that included eight sacred vestments that "without wearing the full number of his vestments, [the High-Priest's] service would be invalid..." God believes in dignity and the more so the higher up you go. The High-Priest wore twice the garments as the ordinary priests and had "gold, the symbol of splendor, appear[ing] in them." Holiness, high dress, and dignity are inseparable.

David McCullough said in his great book, *1776*, "...there was never any mistaking the impeccably uniformed, commanding figure of Washington, who looked always as if on parade."

On the day Washington took command, July 3rd, 1776, a young doctor, James Thatcher, witnessed the ceremony and said of Washington:

His Excellency was on horseback, in company with several military gentlemen. It was not difficult to distinguish him from all others. His personal appearance is truly noble and majestic, being tall and well proportioned. His dress is a blue coat with buff colored facings, a rich epaulet on each shoulder, buff underdress, and an elegant small sword, a black cockade in his hat.

The father of our country, perhaps, set the standard for generations to come on the dignity of dress. It remained strong and fairly consistent until the 1920s and still held respectably strong until the late '60's. Then the hippies, the anti-war crowd, and the sexual revolution gave us blue jeans, unkempt hair, and bad manners and destroyed - slowly but surely - the common social graces, children addressing adults as "sir" and "mam," and dressing with dignity and modesty. What had held strong for generations - like so many icons smashed by the 60s revolution - fell to pieces in a few short years. It's up to Christians to hold the line.

We turned into brutes after the Fall, which is why God dressed Adam and Eve right away -the eyes of fallen man are corrupted from looking on nakedness, and brutes are tamed somewhat by proper dress. Which is why dress has been an issue ever since the Fall: God understands the evil influence of nakedness - and so does Satan.

Our dress, I think, reflects many things about us, but most importantly it reflects our morals and our religion. Our dress is casual, an after-thought. It is slovenly, unkempt, and undignified. It reflects little respect for our fellow man and little respect for God.

It's a Christians duty to be a contrast to the world. Modesty and contrast between the sexes are vital standards to keep. They glorify God and are a lighthouse to a world descending quickly into the depravity of the savages.

Dress is something God has more than a casual interest in - and has since the Garden.

*Quotes on the high priest from *The Temple*, by Alfred Edersheim

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