

February 2018

Dear Brethren:

In the December 2017 issue of this *Letter*, I adopted a first-person writing style to address an important issue with all of you, namely: proper appearance and attire. We will complete that topic here, and I pray that at least some of you are of a mind to take the material seriously. No doubt this issue easily pushes our "hot buttons," but I can only hope that the sincere people of God are willing to hear and to consider seriously the spiritual principles involved. It matters.

Last time, we covered the principle of Deuteronomy 22:5, and the trap of the unisex conspiracy in our Babylonian society today. We focused primarily upon the need for women to avoid wearing garments designed for men, since that has been the greatest thrust of the perversion conspiracy over the last several decades.

But to finish that topic, let us examine the next major agenda of this perverse movement, which is to feminize men's clothing as well.

Perversion of Men's Fashion

From an opinion piece by Michael Snyder at www.charismanews.com on July 3, 2017, entitled, *Hot New Fashion Trend Has Men Dressing in Skirts, Dresses and 8-Inch Heels*:

How would you feel if a man walked into a business meeting wearing a skirt and 8-inch heels? Twenty years ago, that would have been absolutely unthinkable, but, if one American designer has his way, that may soon become the norm. When I saw photos on Facebook of Thom Browne's latest line for men, I have to admit that I was floored. . . .

In recent years, we have been hearing a lot about "gender fluidity," and this is yet another example of that phenomenon. The distinctions between men and women are being blurred, and there are many who would like to eliminate them altogether.

Given enough time, could we eventually get to the point where it is just as acceptable for men to wear skirts and heels as it is for women? Apparently, Thom Browne wants us to have these kinds of conversations:

Gender fluidity in style is no longer a thing for only women, but men too. Thom Browne, an American designer seems to think men should embrace the trend too and rock a few pieces 'borrowed from the girls'. His spring summer collection presented at the ongoing Men's Fashion Week had a slew of dress shirts, tunics, maxi dresses and skirts all worn with pointy-toe heels.

Who says what a man should and shouldn't wear? The collection seems to drive a conversation many of us never want to have. And, if a woman can wear a pantsuit, why can't a man wear a skirt suit?

Why not indeed? What's good for the goose is good for the gander, and so this is merely the next outlandish phase of the "unisex conspiracy" which is being foisted upon us by our spiritual enemy. This is not a trend that is likely to affect the church as much, and yet you might be surprised at how it may impact us nonetheless.

Case in point: No doubt that in other particular ancient cultures, a male skirt was once acceptable (most notably the Scots, with the Scottish kilt). But I have already seen men walking around downtown Eugene, Oregon, wearing skirts, and I can tell you they are not going for the "kilt look." There are some men in the church in past times who have worn kilts as a novelty to highlight their family ancestries. But in today's political climate, I highly discourage it, since to do so would easily be interpreted by many as being "gender progressive." Are you creating an appearance of evil by the way you choose to dress (1 Thessalonians 5:22)? This is not to say that it would be inappropriate, for instance, at a Scottish cultural re-enactment gathering. But sadly, at many other times today it would easily be misconstrued. You will witness more and more of this sad transition as time goes on. There is *no perversion* that human beings will not justify eventually, given enough time to draw it into the mainstream. Just wait and see.

Are Your Pants Too Tight?

The next issue concerning attire—that many in the church still "don't get"—is another distinct element defining *appropriate pants*. I have written about this likewise in

past years, but either many have forgotten, or else my explanation was poor. Therefore, I am going to try to make my meaning very plain this time.

Tight britches should never be worn by a man or a woman in public. That means never, under any circumstance! It applies to both sexes, but according to the past trends in our societies, it has dominated in women's fashion thus far. Here is what I wrote in that same March 2003 *Announcement Letter* to the church that I quoted from in December:

. . . [A]ppropriate slacks for women will never be form-fitting. (That never used to be as much an issue for men, but in today's society, we must admonish men also to reject pants that are too tight.) This also sounds absurd and prudish by today's standards, but that is only because we have been saturated by Satan's perverted world for so long, we all have a tendency to accept these corruptions now without question. Whether it is slacks, dresses, or skirts, a modest woman of God does not wear form-fitting clothing that draws undue attention to the body's shape.

This guideline is automatically going to rule out 95% of all pants (especially jeans) sold for women today (not even counting the guideline against front-fly zippers). Beware also, gentlemen, of the new "skinny" styles that are popularizing very "tight" pants, even in formal wear. It has already been very prominent among homosexuals, but more recently has been mainstreamed aggressively. So both men and women in God's church need to reject these styles.

But it is not only "traditional" slacks or jeans that need to be addressed today. Thanks to another modern trend that has exploded into prominence for women's casual wear, we now need to say something about *yoga pants* and *leggings*.

Do you remember the "old days," when a little girl wearing tights or leotards under her dress would be admonished by her mother if she did not keep her dress discreetly "down"? She would be told that it is not "ladylike" to let her skirt fly up and reveal her leotards underneath. How things have changed. Nowadays, those same leotards do not require any skirt at all to cover them, but are accepted by grown women to wear out in public. In other words, what used to be considered *underwear* is now accepted as *outerwear* by most women today! Lacking any sense of modesty, it's not much different than just walking around in your pantyhose, sans skirt! How times have changed. How did we get to this point?

What is/are called "leggings" today used to be considered a lady's "undergarment." And yoga pants are in the very same category. In both cases, they violate the modesty

rule against "form-fitting" clothes that show every contour of the body. It is simply not discreet, no matter what kind of spin you might want to put on it. Yes, being a *modest woman* in God's eyes will require you to do things differently than all of the women around you. Worldly women will go running, hiking, cycling, or work out at the gym in skin-tight leggings. But they are not modest. The only question is, will you be?

Prostitute Fashion

Perhaps another lesson about the origin of our modern trends will be enlightening. I saw this article from the *New York Times* just a few weeks ago, and it says it all. Here are just a few excerpts from an October 27, 2017, piece entitled, *It's Always Fishnets Season Somewhere*:

The very prevalence of such images [referring to the glorification of prostitutes in movies and TV shows], overworked as they may be, is a testament to their durability. It is reason enough to look more closely at a position advanced by scholars and style arbiters alike: that the clothes we wear, or might like to wear, owe a very real debt to the world's most ancient profession . . .

Not a groundbreaking concept, exactly. "There is an untold history of the relationship between sex workers and fashion," said Rebecca Arnold, a fashion historian and lecturer at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. As fashion's early adopters, working women routinely took up what their respectable contemporaries shunned as too showy, tasteless, or new.

"The dubious woman could be more outlandish in her dress, and more experimental," Ms. Arnold said. "She is allied with the idea of fashion as linked, not necessarily with the avant-garde, but with the beginning of new dress trends." . . .

"In the disco era, fashion was inspired by drag queens and prostitutes," said Tom Fitzgerald, one half of Tom & Lorenzo, an opinionated fashion blog. "Fashion is always borrowing from street wear, and it doesn't get more street wear than hooker." . . .

[Referencing specific examples of pop icons and actresses today who sport these styles:] What's so compelling about these images? They hint, among other things, at invulnerability. "Designers make references to sex workers

to communicate toughness." said James Kaliardos, a founder of Visionaire. There is an understanding, he said, that their client can be a mother, teacher or other professional, and still want to armor herself in fetish wear.

With this concept in mind, how much of the clothing that women in God's church have adopted today likewise originated from prostitutes? If you think this is "over the top" dramatization, then by all means, continue to embrace every "latest fashion" that comes out, so you can be sure to "fit in." But if there are any women in God's church who instead desire to represent Him as proper *ladies*, then perhaps a different approach would be advised.

Wearing a short tunic over tight pants and knee-high, high-heeled leather boots might avoid a *technical* violation of the dress code principles I have already outlined, but it still screams "hooker," rather than "lady." Each of you must choose what "look" you are going for. I suggest that godly women go back and reacquaint themselves with the general standard for dress that Mr. Armstrong gave to us. From *The Good News* magazine, September, 1962, entitled *Women's Dress Ruling*, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong wrote:

. . . in conformity with the Word of God, God's Church encourages women to dress neatly, pleasingly, attractively within the bounds of proper modesty and good taste, and even with sufficient becoming style to express personality and individuality. God Himself expressed perfect artistry in beautiful design in nature—in the lily—the rose—beautiful trees, shrubs and plants—in prize-winning livestock—and even in the beautiful human body, when healthy and not degenerated.

Those are guidelines for attire that have never gone out of style, and they reflect the very same principles God inspired Paul to write about to the church in the first century:

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works (1 Timothy 2:9–10).

What else is included within the principles of modesty? In general, clothing should never draw undo attention to the individual. Last year, while traveling through an airport in Frankfurt, Germany, I saw a man who certainly appeared to be wealthy, but he *most assuredly* was eccentric. He was wearing an expensive sports jacket, dress slacks,

and high-quality leather shoes. But the dress pants (blue in color) had a print of white anchors covering them from top to bottom, the sports jacket was a gawdy neon-green color, and the expensive dress shoes were bright yellow. He was a spectacle! This is an extreme example, but perfect to make the point about modesty. It is immodest to do anything that seeks to draw attention to the self. So this includes our words, our behaviors, and yes, our choice of attire. You can adhere to every guideline for proper attire—technically, legalistically—and still have ample opportunity to violate *the spirit of the law*, if that is your real intent. Wear your bright yellow patent-leather shoes if you want to, but do not do so thinking you are in any way displaying godly modesty.

How would this apply in a more practical way to some of your other decisions about attire? Ladies, besides making sure you pick clothing that is truly feminine, and ladylike, also beware of clothes that are too revealing. Avoid plunging necklines, short skirts, or any other attire that may be very attractive and feminine, but still pushes the boundaries of modesty. When in doubt, *leave it out!* Practical guidelines? Don't show your sternum! The sternum is the breastbone that runs down the center of your chest (the one that all of your ribs connect to). Don't just cover your breasts, but make sure your breastbone is covered as well, and if you do that, you will be absolutely safe from the appearance of being immodest.

How about skirt lengths? The practical standard used in God's church for decades was always "knee-length." How do you tell that a dress or skirt is truly knee-length? While wearing it, get down on your knees, and while in that position, straighten the rest of your body fully (no slouching, meaning you are in a true "L" position). If your skirt is touching the floor, it is OK. If it is still floating above the floor, it is too short. Simple! If your dress passes this test, it means that when you sit down in it, it will still be covering the top of your knees. By the way, the deacons in our congregations will not be administering this test to ladies who attend church services. This is your responsibility before God, and you need to choose to comply with these standards for your own sake. I hope you will. (More on that later.)

After you choose all of the elements of what you will wear in public, whether casual or formal, then ask yourself what image you will be creating among all who see you. Are you truly manifesting the light of Jesus Christ as a godly man or woman? That is the ultimate standard that should drive all of these apparel choices.

Hair Length, Style, and Color

In keeping with God's intent to make a strong distinction between the appearance of men and women, hair length is part of that law.

Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God (1 Corinthians 11:14–16).

How long is *too long* for a man, and how short is *too short* for a woman? To provide a practical guideline, a man's hair should not touch the collar of his shirt (assuming a standard-collared dress shirt), and a woman's hair should not be shorter than her collar, or even better, her neck. This is not an explicit "law," but simply a general guideline to help you make a good decision for yourself. To make it even more understandable, your hair length and hairstyle should be such that if a stranger sees you from the back or side, even for just a fleeting moment, he should have *no doubt* whether you are male or female. If your appearance would make anyone do a double-take concerning your sex, something is wrong.

What about hair coloring? Coloring the hair is in the very same category as wearing makeup. Wearing makeup is not acceptable before God for His chosen people. We have ample documentation on this doctrine from Mr. Herbert Armstrong, and for more details please read our November 2002 *Monthly Letter*, entitled, *A History of the Doctrine on Makeup in God's Church*. Suffice it to say here that coloring of the hair is no more permissible than is any other kind of makeup. Women may be more inclined to use hair color because of worldly styles, but that too has been morphing more and more to include men. God said that the gray-headed one—"hoary head"—is one to be honored (Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 16:31). How will the people of God teach this principle to our youth if we are all coloring our hair? For those of you that have been using hair color, for how long will you continue to do it? Till you are in your 80s? Maybe just until you turn 70? How about 60? When will you finally be "too old" to be trying to make yourself look like a thirty-year-old? Eventually, even the world mocks one who takes hair dye too far. The people of God should never even start playing the game to begin with.

Attire for Church Attendance

What about proper attire for church services on Sabbaths and Holy Days? The overriding principle emphasizes we are coming into the very presence of God. If you were called before the president, prime minister, or royalty of your country, how would you dress for that meeting? Would you not wear your best? Does God—as Sovereign of the whole universe—deserve any less than we would give to human rulers on this earth? In the church, we were taught we should always wear our best to services. If that means

the best we have is a pair of overalls, then that is acceptable to God, given they are clean, pressed, and well cared for. But in most cases, the people of God can afford something better for these solemn occasions. In fact, if you think you cannot afford better than a pair of overalls, please contact me and I would be very happy to help you solve your problem. There are many inexpensive solutions for those who care enough to act upon them. What guidelines should we use?

Men ordinarily should wear suits and ties (unless the standard for formal dress in your country is something different, like a barong in the Philippines). Suits and ties are the standard today in most countries for formal occasions. Over past decades, a number of men have tried to argue that suits and ties are modern inventions, and that Jesus Christ did not wear them. But the spiritual principle is that Christ wore what was customary *for His time*, including what was acceptable for formal occasions, as long as it did not violate any other law of God. In our day, golf shirts, polo shirts, open collars, etc. are considered casual, not formal. While the trend today is to eliminate formal wear more and more, that is one custom the church must reject.

But what about those who would say we are dressing for God, not for men? Keep in mind another important spiritual principle. "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). This tells us true Christians are accountable not only to be right in heart before God, but also to work specifically to avoid creating a negative impression in the minds of others. This does not mean we are to obsess over what someone else might think. But it does mean we are each responsible for taking into account the natural impression our actions and behaviors might leave upon others. What does that have to do with church attire? A man who resists wearing a suit and tie for other than financial constraints is willing to let others assume he feels it is OK to dress casually before God. Oh yes, it can be clarified one-on-one that this is not the intended orientation, but the very fact such explanations have to be given is evidence an appearance of evil is first being made, and then thereafter needing correction. For those who resist ties because they are uncomfortable, the solution is usually to buy a dress shirt with the correct collar size. A well-fitting collar allows one to fasten the top button without constricting the neck. A tie that is not too tight need not bind or cause real discomfort. Even a string tie would be better than no tie at all.

What about the ladies? The rules outlined above for women's dress all apply especially to attire for church services. If one is weak—and inclined to depart from God's standard of dress during the week—by all means, at least refrain from bringing such weakness into the church. Habits of wearing inappropriate clothes should be rooted out altogether, but let it begin by correcting our appearance when we come before God.

The Clothing Gestapo?

What is the proper role of the ministry in relation to all of these principles and guidelines? I will let my comments from that same 2003 *Announcement Letter* suffice:

What about ministerial enforcement of dress standards within the church? Decades ago, many of you may have experienced an administrative philosophy whose intent was to create a "perfect" church. While very well-meaning, real obedience is by faith—of the heart and mind—and not merely an outward appearance. If those attending services comply with the law only out of fear of the ministry—and not a heartfelt desire to please God—then God does not accept that orientation anyway, and sin still exists. So no human being—minister or otherwise—can ever create a perfect church. The results of that misguided—howbeit earnest—goal became all too evident in its failure to produce spiritual fruits. Those who adhered to church teachings out of fear—without real faith—ultimately cast them aside when real trials surfaced. The *real* process of perfection is taking place in the minds of those who are *willingly* overcoming the carnal nature and putting on more of the mind of Jesus Christ.

It was therefore never Mr. Raymond Cole's approach to have deacons scrutinizing members' dress and militantly intercepting and confronting those who did not fully measure up. Neither should it be the laity's role to scrutinize one another. (However, if one continues to dress questionably, wears make-up—which God despises—or engages in any other prohibited behavior, one hardly has anyone else to blame if negative attention is attracted. If we know these things are wrong, why would we bring more problems upon ourselves by insisting on bringing worldly customs into the church?) Mr. Cole spoke strongly from the pulpit God's requirements for obedience—without holding back—and then made it the individual's responsibility to act upon that knowledge. Certainly, if something considered blatant sin is brought into the body—having the potential to destroy the flock—that must be dealt with strongly by the ministry. But such authority has never been exercised in Church of God, The Eternal in an arbitrary or presumptuous way. This ministry seeks to give time for overcoming, as long as an attitude of rank rebellion is not being manifested. Has that orientation led us to more and more liberality in the last twenty-eight years of our existence? No, it has not, which is the best proof of the wisdom of that benevolent administration.

With that being said, I hope such patience and long-suffering by the ministry will not be misinterpreted as weakness or fear of confrontation. If it ever becomes apparent our long-suffering—in giving time for repentance concerning the dress of some in the church—begins to cause serious problems for the body at large, such issues will be dealt with to preserve proper peace and unity. The majority—if truly converted—should be manifesting good fruits in many ways, including personal attire. Those who are sincere will heed these instructions, not as the opinions of any man, but the literal instructions of God.

Dear friends of the common Faith, these are the principles that I have felt compelled to cover for the benefit of the whole church. I am claiming that Jesus Christ has inspired me directly to focus these two *Monthly Letters* on the topic. Now it is up to you to either agree with that blunt assertion, or to reject it. Please choose wisely.

You are all much loved and appreciated for the sacrifices you have already made in your lives to try to come out of this world and to live in the example of Jesus Christ. May God grant you each to continue in that path, and to manifest even more of the light of His Way in the time you have remaining.

With sincere love in our merciful Savior,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the text "With sincere love in our merciful Savior,".

Jon W. Brisby