

NOT DRESSED FOR CHURCH

James 2:2-4 ... "For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, 'You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, 'You stand there,' or 'Sit here at my footstool,' have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?"

The practice of "dressing up for church," did not really exist until about 100 years ago when sewing machines and factory-made clothing began to make it possible for people to have multiple sets of clothes. There was also a church movement in the 1800s that professed that "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." These two developments led to believers adopting the idea that they should look their best when they attend church. They felt that getting dressed up in special church clothes would make God happy. However, today's verse should correct that misunderstanding.

1 Samuel 16:7 reads "...For the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." I have lived through several cycles of beliefs regarding how one should dress for church. When I was young, it was common for men to wear suits (coat and tie) and women to wear fine dresses to church. When I was a young adult during the Jesus movement in California, people came to church in shorts and t-shirts, or anything they pleased. As a lay minister in churches just a few years ago, it was more or less expected that people would dress their best, whatever that might have been. Today, even pastors often wear jeans and t-shirts when they preach.

Here in the Philippines, people seem to have their own ideas about what they should wear to church. There are no rules in most churches. I think that is just fine. As our verse from 1 Samuel says, "the Lord looks at the heart." If you have nice clothes for church, go ahead and wear them. If you do not have nice clothes, wear what you have. Both should be equally welcomed in church. Do not put poorly dressed people in one section, and nicely dressed people in another section.

However, it can also be true that what is in your heart, is displayed on your body. You cannot imitate a godly person by wearing nice clothes to church. If you are not a godly man or woman, your nice suit or dress is merely a costume. If you are a teenager involved in drugs, sexual promiscuity, or crime, your fashionable clothes will not make you a good person. If you cheat your customers and mistreat your employees, your nice church clothes are not a substitute for living righteously. I have been in church services in which female worship leaders led the singing wearing miniskirts and dancing as if they are at a videoke bar. God sees your heart. What you wear to church is not about fashion. It is about your attitude and the place God occupies in your heart. Before you attend church next Sunday or Saturday, check your heart and your attitude, for that is much more important than what you will wear.

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