

## Lesson 9

### CHRIST AND CUSTOM

This lesson will deal with the outward appearance of men and women. What is the relationship of the teachings of Christ to modern day custom and style? This subject can become controversial for it offends Christian legalists and disturbs Christian libertines. The key is to maintain a Biblical emphasis and a Christian balance.

#### DEFINITIONS

**Style.** A fashion, usually approved or tolerated by the masses, and has a long acceptance by the public.

**Fad.** A style or fashion that has a short acceptance by the public

**Custom.** A whole body of practices or conventions which regulate social life. It is an established way of doing things that acts with the force of a law, which is usually transmitted from one generation to another.

**Culture.** A particular stage of civilization as that of a certain nation or period. It is the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another.

**Christ.** The unchanging Son of God who is the Lord and Savior of all who trust Him.

**Eternal Moral Law.** The inflexible and unchanging law of God which tells His people how to live godly lives in an ungodly world.

**Nature of Man.** The inflexible and unchanging sin nature embedded within every human being

#### OBSERVATIONS

Culture, custom and style cannot be static for they are influenced by new and sometimes revolutionary ideas. Culture is very slow to change for it is the bedrock of society; custom changes more rapidly but style changes with the whims (fades) of the people. Custom and style express the mind of the people in a sociological grouping.

What is “in” today may be “out” tomorrow. Styles change with the thinking of the masses. What is odd now may become vogue later.

Yet Christ, the eternal moral law and the basic sinful nature of man never change. Whatever man’s external appearance may be, these three things, which deal with, the internal aspects of man never change. Christ meets the internal needs of man and what he is externally is relatively unimportant.

Christians should remember that the great majority of the world will never be Christians. Christians are a chosen-out group, unique in every sense, to glorify God. Therefore, Christians should not be too concerned about accepting the extremes of the world.

## STYLES FOR MEN

### Hair

Hairstyles for men have been frustrating society for centuries, and they have become controversial in most societies. Is long hair right or wrong according to the Bible?

**Length of Hair in the Old Testament.** Sampson had very long hair. *Having put him to sleep in her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him (Judg. 16:19).* Absalom, the third son of King David, was a handsome man who cut his hair only once a year. *Whenever he cut the hair of his head—he used to cut his hair from time to time when it became too heavy for him—he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels by the royal standard (2 Sam. 14:26).* The Shulammite woman sings of the locks of her beloved that are “wavy (bushy, curly) and black as a raven” (Song of Sol. 5:11).

**Length of Hair in the New Testament.** The general custom of that day was to have cropped hair (short) among the Jews, Greeks and Romans. Short hair was the mark of civilized men and long hair was a sign of softness and effeminacy. What then does it mean in 1 Corinthians 11:14 which says, “...if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him?” In context, Paul is arguing for the fact that women should have their heads covered when praying and speaking in the local church. One argument was that nature itself shows that in general a woman’s hair is richer and grows longer than man’s hair. Therefore, if nature has covered woman then she should be covered in the local church. Hodge makes this observation,

“Nature gives the man short hair and the woman long hair; and therefore nature itself teaches that long hair is a disgrace to the one and an ornament to the other; for it is disgraceful in a man to be like a woman, and a woman to be like a man. Wearing long hair was contrary to the custom of both Jews and Greeks. It was considered so much a mark of effeminacy for men to wear long hair, that it was

ridiculed by Juvenal, and in later times seriously censured by church councils” (Charles Hodge, 1 Corinthians, P. 213).

How can this be harmonized with the Old Testament teaching on long hair? The answer is probably found in the changing custom. However, some have taken this as advanced revelation and think that all long hair is wrong.

There were exceptions to the short hair custom and that was the religious sect of the Nazarites who wore their hair long. ***During the entire period of his vow of separation no razor may be used on his head (Num. 6:8).*** On the other hand, priests were not permitted to shave their heads or have long hair. ***They must not shave their heads or let their hair grow long, but they are to keep the hair of their heads trimmed (Ezk. 44:20).***

Jesus Christ probably wore his hair short and not long, which was the custom of that day, although most pictures of Christ come out of the Middle Ages, when long hair was in vogue.

**Length of Hair and Custom Change:** Most ancient cultures permitted men to wear long hair (Egyptians, Assyrians, etc.) that came just about to the shoulder. These hairstyles were often wavy and curly. The ancient Greek Pythagoras cut all his hair off; yet Euripides wore it long. The Spartan culture thought highly of long hair. Julius Caesar wore his hair short, Shakespeare long. Thomas Jefferson wore his hair short to fit under his beautiful wig. Louis XIV of France let his hair hang to his scapula. In the 18th Century gentlemen wore periwigs with pigtail, bobtails and cascades of curls.

The Romans have influenced western culture most and short hair would become the accepted cultural pattern. However, many early American presidents had long hair (Washington, Van Buren, etc.), and in the taming of the American West long hair was in. Even military men like General Custer had long hair to the shoulders.

In various cultures in the world, long hair is accepted. China would accept long hair. India would not. African nations would most likely not approve of long hair for men.

Beards

**Men wore beards both in the Old and New Testaments and it was thought by many to be a mark of masculinity. Most ancient cultures had bearded men but each culture had their own styles. The clean-shaven look came from the Roman and Greek cultures but was not popular during the Middle Ages. People change on the outside but they do not change on the inside.**

**If a Christian has the freedom to wear a beard, mustache or long hair, it should be neat, clean and well kept. As one person said, Cleanliness is next to godliness.”**

Clothing

Deuteronomy 22:5 states that a clear distinction is to be made between the sexes in relation to dress: ***“A woman must not wear men’s clothing, nor a man wear women’s clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this.”*** This verse teaches that a divine distinction of the sexes is to be kept up by the clothing peculiar to each sex. Every invasion of the natural peculiarities of the sexes, every mingling of sexual differences, is an offense to God and society. Every violation of these distinctions, even in externals, not only leads to impurity, but also involves the infraction of the laws of God.

Styles may change but men’s clothing should always be masculine and women’s feminine. For instance, in Biblical times a Jew or a Roman man would wear a toga or a short skirt with legging, and a woman would also wear a toga. Yet the togas distinguished the sexes perfectly. The Bible refutes the whole idea about unisex, which is trying to make men and women look alike.

## **Jewelry**

The Bible does not say that men cannot wear jewelry. Probably the most controversial is men wearing earrings. If jewelry is to be worn, it should be masculine and not feminine in character and should make a man manlier.

## **Tattoos**

**Tattoos for both men and women are very popular today in western culture, and various forms of making permanent marks on the skin have been part of African cultures for centuries. The Mosaic Law taught that cutting the body and tattooing the body were forbidden. *Do not cut our bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord (Lev. 19:28).***

**If cutting and scaring the body is done as part of pagan rituals, it must not be done. The Christian is not under the Mosaic Law, but the verse in Leviticus might show us that God would prefer His people not to be tattooed. However, it still falls under the category of a questionable practice. However, if the practice becomes offensive and a stumbling block to Christians or in any way hinders the Christian’s witness to the world, it should not be done.**

## **General Thoughts on Customs for Men**

People become conditioned to style and custom. They like what they are used to. Custom changes drastically about every 100 years for men.

Each new generation has its own styles and customs and they become part of society. Then their children get new styles and the older generation cannot make a quick adjustment. And the cycle goes on.

In some cultures, long hair, beards and jewelry still represent, in the minds of some people, a rebellious attitude out to destroy the institutions of culture. We must be careful about tabbing everyone with long hair as radical because it just may be a preference. This would be guilt by association. We must evaluate every individual for what he is and not what he looks like, for God looks on the heart.

Long hair, beards, tattoos, jewelry, etc become a doubtful thing or questionable practice for some Christians in various societies because most people still think these represent political radicals, drug users and counter-cultural revolutionaries. Therefore, if these things become an offence to others so as to cause Christian brothers to stumble or non-Christians to fail to listen to our gospel, we should gladly set them aside.

Jesus Christ is just as relevant for cultures and subcultures. Outwardly man changes but inwardly he is still a sinner who needs forgiveness, and Christ, who never changes, can meet the spiritual vacuum of all men. The eternal moral law never changes, and if men and women keep the moral law inwardly, they are pleasing God. Yet, the external appearance may not be pleasing to man.

## STYLES FOR WOMEN

**God wants a woman to be beautiful, for her beauty has been given her by the grace of God. A Christian woman is to avoid the radical extremes of the world system. Yet custom does change so that what use to be daring is now accepted.**

### General Verses

**1 Peter 3:3-4. *Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. In stead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.*** This whole context is an exhortation to women who had become Christians but their husbands were not converted to Christ and were yet in heathenism. Paul gave some practical exhortations on how to win their husbands to Christ. These Christian wives had been saved out of rank heathenism and their lives before conversion to Christ conformed in every detail to the world. It appears that when their husbands did not respond to Christ these women began to turn to outward seductive methods to lure their husbands to Christ. They turned to the worldly adornment they wore before they were saved. They became immodest, gaudy and conspicuous.

Many of these things mentioned in this verse were the attire of harlots of that day. The ladies of the evening would gather their hair into elaborate knots and plait it with golden combs and nets. This would attract attention immediately to the hair, face and body.

This does not say a woman should not care for her hair or have a neat, stylish hairdo. The Word of God forbids a woman to have a worldly hairdo that becomes conspicuous, extravagant or gives an air of artificiality. The Christian woman is to avoid a worldly artificiality so as to give anyone the slightest idea that she condones the extremes of the world's system.

This does not say a woman cannot wear hair extensions or a wig. But whatever she wears must not draw attention to her and be consistent with the conservative style of the day.

This verse does not say a woman cannot wear gold jewelry. The word “wear” should be translated “putting around” or “wrapping around” and here gives the picture of these wives covering their bodies with a lavish, conspicuous display of golden jewelry. It was the custom of harlots to put golden jewelry on the head as diadems, or the arms as bracelets, on the leg as anklets, or the fingers as rings. The jewelry was so placed so as to attract attention to certain parts of the woman’s body.

The wearing of jewelry in general is not forbidden for Christian women, but a gaudy, expensive and elaborate display of jewelry so as to attract attention to the body is forbidden.

The wearing of clothing here is not saying that a Christian woman should not wear attractive dress, but the donning of such apparel as these wives were using in an effort to win their husbands to the Lord, immodest, gaudy and conspicuous clothing the worldly wore.

A Christian woman should dress in the conservative style of the day. She should not wear clothing that attracts to her so as to cause men to unnecessarily lust after her. There is a difference between being beautiful and being sexy, and only God can help the Christian woman make this distinction. A Christian woman can be conspicuous by being poorly groomed as well as being over-groomed. One extreme is as bad as the other. Just because a woman is a fundamentalist does not mean she has to look like one. Christians are ambassadors for the King of kings and they should dress as those who represent royalty. Christians never have a second chance to make a first impression.

**1 Timothy 2:9-10. *I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*** The Christian is to dress modestly (well-arranged clothing). The adornment of the Christian woman should be one in which order not disorder reigns. “Decency” means beautiful but not seductive. “Propriety” refers to self control in dress so as not to dress immorally. The “braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes” refers to seductive dress of lewd women (see above).

1 Timothy 2:9-10 in context is referring to the public assembly of the local church. Any article of clothing or arrangement of make-up that distracts from Christ and brings attraction to a woman is wrong. The church service is not a fashion show but a time to center thoughts on Christ and worship Him.

#### Other Issues

**Cosmetics.** The Scriptures say nothing one way or the other about cosmetics for women. Cosmetics are not the mark of a worldly woman as some radical fundamentalists claim. Every woman must make up her own mind before God on this issue. Worldliness is an inner attitude that excludes Christ, so one can be worldly with or without makeup or one can be spiritual with it. Someone said, “If the barn needs painting, paint it!”

Some women should tone down their make-up and others should put some on. If a person is rightly related to Christ, all these external things take care of themselves

Those who do not wear make up often judge those who do, which is sin. But often those who wear make up frown upon those who do not, which is also sin. Let every woman be fully persuaded in her own mind and decorate her face in a way that brings glory to Jesus Christ.

**Hair.** Women are to have attractive hairdos but should avoid the extremes of the world. This same rule would apply to jewelry or whatever.

**Tattoos.** It has become a fad in the western world for women to get tattoos on their bodies, usually put in places that are not seen or are inconspicuous. This is a fad and certainly a questionable practice (see above).