

Laid Back, Hip – and Irreverent?

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The general abandonment of decorum in society over a couple of generations has obviously had its impact on the Lord's people – especially observable in our worship assemblies. I preached in a Gospel meeting several years ago before which the local preacher told me that the brethren were "laid back" in the way they dressed for worship. He was trying to prepare me for the fact that those who would be leading in worship would likely be "casually" dressed. Some of them didn't even make that "grade."

In another Gospel meeting in which I preached, the congregation used varied song leaders, some of whom wore neither coat nor tie. One poor fellow wore jeans, an ugly, open-collared shirt, and sneakers and sported a distracting, obviously unkempt beard. Had he worn hunting boots he could have been mistaken for "Jeremiah Johnson," just down from his mountain cabin (never mind that he could hardly carry a tune). If such attire represented the best these men could do, they would have received no criticism from me. This hardly seemed to be the case, however. Rather, such behavior had *thoughtless, careless, sloppy, I don't care, and/or lazy* (to say nothing of *irreverent*) written all over it.

I have known of elders who wear coat and tie to work during the week, but who went coatless and golf shirted, for their greater "work" on the Lord's day. T-shirts at the Lord's table (especially "message" T-shirts) hardly contribute to Scriptural meditation on the cross. Some seem to wear offbeat attire in order to "make a statement." While visiting elsewhere, I have seen some younger preachers and youth "leaders" who show up for worship assemblies in cut-off jeans or cargo shorts, T-shirts, and flip-flops to show how "hip" and "with it" they are or perhaps even to express rebellion at decorum and basic neatness.

Whether we (male or female) "dress up" or "dress down" indicates an attitude toward the activity or function in which we are participating. I am addressing men particularly, however. While admitting some extenuating circumstances (e.g., coming immediately from work with no time to change, the less formal setting of Wednesday evening Bible study, et al.), what you wear may reflect how seriously you take the activity in which you are engaging (to say, "I hadn't thought about that," makes my point). I could not picture any of the men described above dressing so sloppily for an important business appointment or to serve as a pallbearer for a family member's or close friend's funeral service. Surely, one would not think of

appearing before an earthly monarch disheveled, unkempt, and wearing yardwork or golf-course garb. He would do his best not to detract from royalty by appearing slovenly or even casual in his attire.

Yet, men all too often, representing the most important cause on earth, come before the King of kings, saying by their shoddy appearance that the occasion was not even worth dressing up for. Many of the grandfathers of my generation wore bib overalls to worship on Sunday, but these were the best they had. The one day in the week they wore a white shirt (if they had one) was the Lord's day. They perceived that going to worship was worth dressing up for – and I believe they got it right.

Yes, God is more concerned with the inside, rather than merely with the outside, of men (1 Sam. 16:7). However, we may indicate what is inside by what we do with the “outside.” The Lord said that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Mat. 12:34), and we may “talk” with our attire. Have we forgotten the simple, but important, principle of doing all things “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40) (written in the very context of behavior in a worship assembly, incidentally)? I am not suggesting that we turn our worship assemblies into fashion shows. I am rather urging that we, especially those who lead in worship, dress in such a way as to indicate how important they believe the worship of Almighty God and His Son is.

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