

Fashion

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HAVE YOU EVER turned up for an occasion only to find that you are totally overdressed? Or been unsure of the dress code for a particular event and felt you had let the side down? If only we had checked beforehand what would have been appropriate! From the glitzy evening dresses which make their appearance at an annual dinner, to the eminently sensible waterproofs worn on hill-walking expeditions, it is an obvious truth that people dress according to occasion. But are there any principles which should affect how we dress all the time as brothers and sisters?

It is not the intent of this article to produce a list of guidelines about how we should or should not be affected by the changing fashions around us, but rather to explore what our clothes say about us. The first point about fashions is that they are passing trends, determined largely by designers and retailers heavily influenced by what celebrities of the moment choose to wear. The diamond earrings worn by David Beckham soon spark cheaper imitations in the High Street which may or may not become fashionable.

In order to keep bang up-to-date with every passing fashion, our resources would be drained pretty quickly, and the chasing after wind (AV, vexation of spirit) that is spoken of in the book of Ecclesiastes comes to mind. Coco Chanel once said that "Fashion is made to become unfashionable", and so it is. Once consumers begin to follow fashion closely, they find that there is no end to the 'must have' buys in the shops; once new but now 'unfashionable' items will be constantly discarded for ones which are up-to-date. We then have to ask, Is this an appropriate pre-occupation for us or not?

Another aspect of clothing to consider is our attitude to branding. The motives behind buying particular labels are not simple, and neither are buyers necessarily conscious of what they are doing when they select one brand over another (such is the insidious nature of advertising and peer pressure). There are several reasons why someone might choose a fashionable brand of sweater in preference to a cheaper version of the same item. The item may be better quality

and thus justify a higher price; we might have a loyalty to that particular store and buy many of our clothes there; we might like others to know where we bought the item so that we fit into a particular group; or we might simply think it fits better. It is worth examining our motives to check whether any element of snobbery enters the equation when we are making these choices. Is this about me choosing this because I like it (this may or may not be justifiable, depending on the relative extravagance of the item), or is it about me trying to impress others and feel part of the crowd?

The brands we choose give away where allegiance lies and can be used to distinguish ourselves from others. People may want to separate themselves and impress others with the fact that they can afford a particular style of dress. However, buying with these sorts of principles in mind demonstrates a belief in the importance of appearances. It shows an over-concern about what our clothes say about us, and may lead us to judge others in a similar way. Of course, it is nice to buy new clothes, and if we can afford to do so then this is a privilege. It is not strictly necessary to dress as if in a seventies time warp in order to show that we do not care what the world thinks about us (in fact you would probably find yourself fashionable again if you stuck at it long enough!).

Take a look at what you are wearing right now and ask yourself what your clothes say about you. Do you want to be saying this? And should you be saying it, even if you want to? While it is not true that we are what we wear, it is still the case that our appearance says something about us. It is worth considering the effect on our brothers and sisters of what we wear. As in all decisions made, actions can be either a good or a bad example to others.

Can the wearing of overtly sexual dress be sending out the right message? Do we want to say that it does not really matter how we turn out for meetings together, and that we are prepared to make a greater effort with dress in other areas of life than we are for going to the meeting? We each have a responsibility to at least consider whether our choice of dress is ap-

propriate. It may be true that God looks into the inner man, but this does not cancel out the fact that the outer relays a message about the inner.

Dress is an issue which centres around moderation. Each of us needs to consider what is an appropriate amount of time and money to spend on new clothes. The basic principle is that focus-

ing too much attention on the outward man is essentially folly. It is alien to the Scriptural principle that God sees us as we really are—naked in our sins—and that He wants us to develop the hidden man of the heart. Just as the flimsiest fig leaves were inadequate to hide sin, the most expensive Armani suit will fare no better in His sight.

“In heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 2:6)

The exalted status of God’s children

John Allfree

This article:

- examines the use of the phrase “the heavenlies” in the letter to the Ephesians
- introduces the reader to the rich Old Testament background that helps provide an appreciation of what is meant by “the heavenlies”
- underlines the privileged position, both now and in the future, of those who by God’s grace sit in “the heavenlies”
- highlights the responsibilities that such privilege brings.

IN EPHESIANS 1, after his salutation in verses 1 and 2, the Apostle Paul plunges into his message of exhortation and instruction with the words, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (v. 3). The word “places” is in italics in the AV, indicating that the translators have supplied it in order to convey the sense of the original. The word “heavenly” is a neuter plural adjective and is preceded by the definite article. J. B. Rotherham in his *Emphasised Bible* and B. Wilson in *The Emphatic Diaglott* give the translation, “God . . . has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies”. It is the purpose of this study to examine the significance of this phrase ‘the heavenlies’, and to marvel at God’s grace toward us in exalting us to sit in them.

The expression ‘the heavenlies’ is found five times in the letter to the Ephesians, and in this precise form it is found in no other place in Scripture.¹ It is worth listing the verses:

1:3. Here, as we have already noted, the saints are said to be “blessed . . . with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places [in the heavenlies] in Christ”.

1:20,21. “[God] raised [Jesus] from the dead, and set him at His own right hand in the heavenly places [in the heavenlies], far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come”.

2:4,6. “God . . . hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places [in the heavenlies] in Christ Jesus”.

3:9,10. “. . . and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, Who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places [in the heavenlies] might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God”.

6:12. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places [in the heavenlies]”.

1. J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 20.