

What Do We Wear to Worship God?

By Bob Kauflin

A leader sent this question to me:

Recently there have been some people offended by some of the appearance of the worship team. We are seeking to glorify God in our response. We do not want to go beyond what the Scripture says. What are some of the standards that you would hold for your worship team?

I'm assuming that "appearance" refers to what someone is wearing. I appreciate this person's desire to follow God's Word when it comes to the attire of those who lead congregational worship. Unfortunately, God isn't as clear as we might want Him to be, which is a good thing. Can you imagine if God told us exactly what a godly person should wear? What do you think He'd say? L.L. Bean? Gap? Brooks Brothers? Coat and tie for the men and dresses for the ladies? Jeans, t-shirts, and sandals for everyone? Your answer reveals something about how you view God, but not too much about how God views us.

While we may lack specifics, God has certainly given us guidelines both for what we wear on our bodies, and more importantly, what we wear in our hearts as we gather to worship Him.

There are at least two groups of people to address in this situation. First, the members of the team. We seek to make sure that our musicians know their role is to draw attention to the surpassing greatness of God's glory in Jesus Christ. That means clothing that would draw attention to them is inappropriate. Categories include clothes that are immodest, tight, "loud," dirty, or sloppy. Of course, those standards are variable in different cultures and to different people, but usually every church has a fairly defined idea as to what qualifies. Regarding modesty, we want to avoid anything that accentuates or reveals what could be sexually alluring.

At times, we have to follow up with musicians who wear something inappropriate. When we do, we expect them to respond humbly, as their role is to serve the congregation, not prove that they're "free in Christ." By the way, our pastors, who stand on the side of the stage as we sing, are dressed in a variety of styles. We purposefully want to communicate that we don't believe a certain kind of dress equates to godliness. While we appreciate and respect the conviction some have that dressing up is a way of showing honor to God as we meet together, we're convinced that God places the greater emphasis on the heart attitude behind what we wear, and that the church will always have a wide range of clothing (James 2:1-5).

The second group to address is those who are offended. I'd want to find out why they've taken an offense. Are they truly offended, or concerned or grieved? There's a difference. Offense could imply that the music team member has sinned against them in some way. Unless they know the person involved, they could be judging the team member uncharitably. If there's a genuine concern for dishonoring the Savior, then I'd thank them for having the courage and taking the time to share their perspective. However, if they simply didn't like a style of dress, or wanted the musicians to adhere to some specific standard that isn't in Scripture, I'd try to help them see beyond the clothes to a person's heart. None of this is to say that what we wear doesn't matter. It does. Our clothes communicate volumes about what's in our heart. The problem is, we don't always know what that is.

So, to sum up:

Make the heart the priority.

Challenge and help those who either abuse their freedom or judge other's motives.

Encourage everyone to wear clothes modestly, the character of Christ loudly.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive (Col. 3:12-13).