

Character and Clothing

People form opinions of us based on a variety of factors—including how we dress. We should remember that when we make our clothing decisions.

“Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh. . . . Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck” (Gen. 41:14, 42).



The promotion of Joseph from dungeon dweller to prime minister of Egypt is a remarkable story, but we want to take a closer look at one detail of his elevation that is usually overlooked: the change in Joseph’s wardrobe.

Notice in this story that Joseph went through *two* changes of clothing. The first change was required to prepare Joseph to come into the presence of Pharaoh. Grimy prison garb would have been inappropriate standing before the king. The second upgrade came with his promotion to a high office over all Egypt. He represented Pharaoh before the people, so he had to look the part. Only fine linen and gold would do in that role.

What does this have to do with our lives today? Simply stated, it illustrates the reality that *our clothing reflects who we are*. In our ultra-casual culture, that’s a radical concept. But it’s a truth that we should ponder as we make decisions regarding our apparel.

The Old Testament priests were held to a strict dress code that set them apart from the laity (Ex. 28). With the transition to a New Covenant, that dress code was abrogated along with the priesthood (Heb. 8-10). But that does not mean that our choice of clothing is now inconsequential. *All* of God’s people are now His priests (1 Pet. 2:5, 9), so our clothing should say something about our character as children of the King.

This is especially true of women, who were created by God to be visually attractive to the opposite sex. Both the Bible and human experience recognize something known as “the attire of a harlot” (Prov. 7:10; cp. Gen. 38:14-15). If a woman does not want to be viewed as a prostitute, she should avoid clothing that sends a signal that she is available and willing. That is why Paul urges godly women to “adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation” (1 Tim. 2:9).

Sexual attraction is not the only consideration. Paul and Peter both caution against apparel that flaunts wealth and luxury (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet 3:2-3). Parading ourselves in such an ostentatious manner signals a prideful heart, the very opposite of what we ought to be.

Nothing we have said here calls for creating a formal dress code to be imposed on God’s people. James warns against looking down on the “poor man in filthy clothes” who comes into our assembly (Jas. 2:1-4). Clothing options can be influenced by financial, occupational, and even cultural considerations. Good judgment must be exercised in making these decisions.

Nevertheless, we must recognize the value of the old saying that “clothes make the man [and the woman].” Someday in another realm, we will wear garments of white in the presence of our Lord (Rev. 3:5). Shouldn’t the way we present ourselves to others in this life reflect that hope?

— David King