

# The Reflector

## Immodest Apparel

When I began preaching in the late '50s, what we commonly call "immodest apparel" was worn only by weak and indifferent members of the church. Women who seldom attended Bible classes and only assembled once or twice a month had few scruples against wearing shorts, halters, one-piece swim suits, low cut dresses, skin tight pants or jeans, etc. These same ones donned the mini-skirts, two-piece swim suits, and bikinis when they became popular a few years later. Men, except for wearing swim suits at public pools or beaches, weren't involved as extensively in immodesty.

But now that has all changed. I, for one, am convinced that we have all but lost the battle against immodest apparel. When the middle-aged generation of today is gone and our new generation of youth become the core and backbone of the church, I shudder to think of the meager clothing that will be accepted. Preachers, elders, deacons, Bible-class teachers, and other stable members in many sound churches are caving in to the demands of young people and the numbing influence of an ungodly world. What is mind-boggling and disturbing is that this includes the wearing of immodest apparel by the children of some of the most dedicated members of the church — brothers and sisters who themselves would not think of dressing as their kids do.

These very parents let their kids spend a day of vacation on the beach, permit them to sun bathe in full view of the neighbors, allow them to wear swim suits and short shorts to work in the yard or wash the car, encourage them to wear low-cut, backless dresses to formal parties or join the pom poms, ignore the tight-fitting pants or tops that vividly outline appealing parts of their anatomy, etc.

And what's really sad is that many of their kids have high moral standards otherwise. Why, then, has this become so prevalent?

Many answers, no doubt, can be given. But the simple fact is that kids do it because they want to, like to, and think nothing of it. A humanistic philosophy dominates today's society



— the schools, print media, movie and TV productions, advertisements, commercials, etc. And that philosophy has bombarded us with "do your own thing," "you only go around once in life — get all the gusto you can," "take care of number one", etc. They have also been sold everything from toothpaste, to big "K" cereal, to health-spa memberships with lewd, sexually enticing commercials. Displays of near nudity have become so

commonplace in our homes that kids view it as a normal part of life.

What all this hype brings to mind is an important fact of life. We are reminded daily that God made the bodies of man and woman attractive to one another. He made them pleasant to look upon and created in each a desire for the other sexually. It must be, next to eating, the strongest urge of the flesh. When he finished this creation he saw that it, along with all things, was "very good" (see Gen. 1:27-31). But God from the beginning placed boundaries on man and woman limiting their desires for one another and fulfillment of those urges to marriage. Only there they can become "one flesh," only there is the bed "undefiled," only there "thy desire shall be" to a man, only there shall a man "looketh upon a woman to lust after her" (see Gen. 2:18-25; Heb. 13:4; Gen. 3:16; Matt. 5:27,28).

When men and women dress in a way to create this "lust" or "desire" in someone other than their wife or husband, they promote lasciviousness — inordinate and lewd urges. This includes women who wear tight pants and attractively display an area of the body that entices men, who adorn themselves in clothing that in a sensuous way either accentuates or openly shows the bosom, and who dress in apparel that reveals the most alluring parts of the body, including the legs, and stirs the imagination of the average man. Sadly enough, men now dress in the same manner and women shamelessly and glowingly speak of the impure thoughts this provokes. Paul surely condemns this kind of immodesty when he says: "I want women to dress modestly with decency and propriety... appropriate for women who profess to worship God" (1 Tim. 2:9,10, NIV). — L. A. Stauffer in *Guardian Of Truth*, April 5, 1990

# In Search Of Relevance

The search for relevance is perennial in religious circles. Each new generation has those who regard the words, concepts, and practices of preceding generations irrelevant to their needs and interests and that of their peers. The new generation requires new and exciting concepts expressed in new ways. For this reason, doctrinal subjects, couched in scriptural language, are avoided by so many — in favor of subjects more relevant to “life situations” created by today’s fast-paced world.

Themes rooted in writings over 2000 years old leave little room for new words and concepts. So, the cry goes out for preachers and teachers to shift away from old doctrinal themes to something more “relevant” or “practical.” This was the cry of many in the 50’s as the institutional controversy swept across the land. Leroy Brownlow, in his *“Sermons You Can Preach”* outline book (1958), published an outline called *“Give Us Something Practical.”* He ably dealt with the plea he was hearing, in those days, for more “practical” and less “doctrinal” preaching. He does a good job of showing that nothing can be more practical and relevant to man’s real needs than those old fundamental doctrinal themes that have been preached for years. We are beginning to see the same pattern evolving among some “non-institutional” brethren today.

A subtle shift away from emphasis upon the salvation of the soul, godly living in order to stay saved, preparing for heaven, and avoiding hell toward emphasizing improving man’s “quality of life” on earth is apparent in the promotional materials for gospel meetings (‘cuse me, seminars) and other church activities of today. Why? Because addressing things that deal with the spiritual side of man and the life to come has become irrelevant to the interests of the average person. You see, he wants to know how he can be made *happy now* — feel good about himself *now*, all the time. He is more interested in the here and now than in the hereafter. So, to be relevant, churches and preachers feel they must tailor their

advertising, teaching, and programs to address these “here and now” concerns of people in the church and community at large.

So, many of the more liberal churches have “ministries” that address all of man’s temporal needs and interests. Many of these churches have a counselor or director for just about any physical, social and psychological need (real or perceived) in society. This has become known as the social gospel concept.

Brother Sewell Hall aptly summed up our need to stay away from the social gospel approach: “The real problems of the world are spiritual. The local church is God’s organization for dealing with such problems and the gospel of Christ is the means He has given us with which to confront them. Ten thousand other organizations are addressing the social problems of our day, using every

conceivable resource. *It is urgent that we not allow ourselves to be distracted from our unique mission or disillusioned with God’s unique method.*” (*Guardian Of Truth*, January 2, 1986, p. 12 — Emphasis mine, EOB).

We sincerely believe that we are seeing some “conservative” brethren unwittingly slipping over into the social gospel approach to things — i.e., placing the emphasis upon the here and now. Sermons, class material, and meetings are beginning to shift in that direction. They deal more with stress than sin. More emphasis is given to man’s social and physical welfare than his spiritual welfare. More attention is given to improving social relationships than improving spiritual relationships. More emphasis upon improving man’s quality of life on earth than preparing him for eternal life. The goal subtly shifts from salvation from sin and the hope of

## CONTEXTUALLY SPEAKING ...

### “Examine yourselves ...”

*“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves.” — 2 Cor. 13:5.*

These words, taken at face value, are often used to admonish people to look into themselves to see if they are really in Christ. I have no problem with this. One needs to constantly compare his life with what the Bible teaches to see if he is really faithful to the Lord.

Sometimes the emphasis is place on examining “your own selves” as the KJV puts it. The idea being that we are to examine our own selves rather than examine others. This, too, may be true to some extent.

However, I think we may be missing Paul’s point by not considering the context. There were those who questioned Paul’s apostleship. They were troubling the Corinthians by causing them to question or to “seek proof of Christ speaking in me (Paul).” (v. 3). As proof that Christ was speaking in him, Paul urges the Corinthians to examine themselves. Were there in the faith? Of course, they were! Paul says, “Do you not know that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified.”

If Jesus Christ was in them and they were in the faith, then Christ must have been speaking in Paul. Paul was the very one that espoused them to Christ (11:2). If Christ was not speaking in him, how could they be in the faith as result of his preaching?

So, the Corinthians themselves were proof of Paul’s apostleship. If they examined themselves and concluded that they were in the faith — and they would certainly conclude that they were — they would have to logically say that this was the proof they sought of Christ speaking in Paul. — by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

eternal salvation in heaven to finding happiness and contentment in this present world. The objective is no longer to make men and women more conscience of their sins but ways to make them feel good about themselves.

No one denies that the Bible deals with stress, social relationships, and happiness. But the gospel does not put the emphasis upon these things. The New Testament preachers did not go out preaching Christ as the answer to stress and key to happiness, but Christ as the answer to sin and the author of salvation. That salvation from sin improves happiness and relieves stress, no one denies. We can even see from the Bible that such was the case. But that is not where the emphasis is put. The New Testament church was not a recreational, social, or psychiatric center for the community. It was a spiritual institution with a higher mission.

A man with a headache caused by a diseased internal organ is relieved of headache when the diseased organ is cured. But, if his doctor focuses most of his attention on the headache, he has not really helped the man. He may have given the patient an aspirin, making him feel that he had been healed for a while. An incompetent doctor may even think he has done his job well. After all, the man left his office saying that he felt good about the matter. A good doctor would not have focused on the head, but the organ that was the real problem. Once the root problem was solved the headache would take care of itself.

An individual's spiritual problems may cause him social, psychological, and even physical problems. The gospel deals with the spiritual problem (sin). Once that problem is taken care of the other problems (those relating to his sins) have a way of falling into place. If they are not tied to his sin, then physical, psychological, or social therapy may be in order. But this is not the work of the church or preachers of the gospel. Others can do the job much better.

One problem with the social gospel approach is that it hands out aspirin for headaches when the real problem is much deeper — sin in the

hearts of each individual in society. The gospel of Christ addresses that sin in the life of the individual. Other approaches merely mask the problem and offer only symptomatic relief, while the gospel cures the problem at its root.

So, brethren let's get back to emphasizing the gospel of Christ as the power of God to save man from sin, the wrath to come, and eternally. Let's get back to talking about the church of Christ as that body made up of those saved from sin. Let's get back to emphasizing submission to the authority of Christ as the means of avoiding sin. Let's get back to emphasizing how men and women should live so as to be faithful to Christ, the author of their salvation. Man may find fulfillment for his social, physical and emotional aspirations through a variety of programs offered in the community. But he can find salvation from sin, the hope of eternal life and truth by which he must live to go to heaven only in the gospel of Christ. This is the truth of which the church of Christ is said to be the pillar and ground. (1 Tim. 3:15). Let's strive to keep it that way.

— by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

## Easy Installation

After putting up with a leaking kitchen faucet for over a year, I decided it was time to do some repair work. I found a new set of faucets at the local hardware store. The package promised "easy installation — no tools needed to install." While that statement was true, they failed to mention you need a basin wrench, vise grips and an air hammer to remove the old faucets. It took three hours to remove the old set, and only ten minutes to install the new.

The manufacturer who promised "easy installation" assumed you had a sink, but lacked faucets. The instructions did not even mention that you had to remove your old set first (I figured that out all by myself).

The whole mess under the kitchen sink reminded me of some of the "positive preachers" among us. Their messages are just fine providing the audience is composed of people who were raised on a remote desert island.

Every audience I ever addressed

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had people who were brought up in denominationalism. While I would rather preach about heaven and the beauties of it, I have always felt compelled to "put all the cards on the table" first. It would be much easier to put on a Dale Carnegie "smiley face" and pretend everything is okay. Such would be a neglect of duty on my part. When Peter preached the first gospel sermon in Acts two, he undoubtedly offended many religious folk. He accused them of killing the Son of God (Acts 2:23). He could have tried to gain their confidence by, "fair words" and later preached what they needed to hear. But, what would have happened if some of these people had died before Peter got around to proclaiming the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27)?

When I know people in the audience have never heard the gospel plan of salvation, I make sure they hear it before I'm done. I have never apologized for this. Those who want the truth will not be offended by plain Bible preaching. In Acts seven, Stephen preached nearly the same sermon Peter did in Acts two. The men in Stephen's audience were also "cut to the heart" (Acts 7:54). But, because their heart was not right, they decided to kill this faithful preacher of the word of God.

If I were to stand before a group of Catholics, they might enjoy a good lesson about the errors of Islam. But, a sermon on the one true church would be more in order. If someone could give me a guarantee that death would not come to any of us for several years, I might "build up" to a lesson on the church. In lieu of such guarantees, I will continue to preach what I believe the audience needs.

Several years ago I put a small sign on the pulpit to remind me of the apostle Paul. I do not recall where I borrowed the quote, but it simply said,

The apostle Paul — He

## Installation

Concluded

preached as though he'd never preach again, a dying man to dying men."

Paul reminded the Corinthians that his speech and preaching was not with "persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of god" (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

Timothy was warned the time would come when men would not endure sound doctrine, but would "turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:4). Such men are alive today. Despite the desires of men, we need preachers who will "be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, (and) do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5). —David A. Padfield via *PAUSE-PONDER-PROFIT*

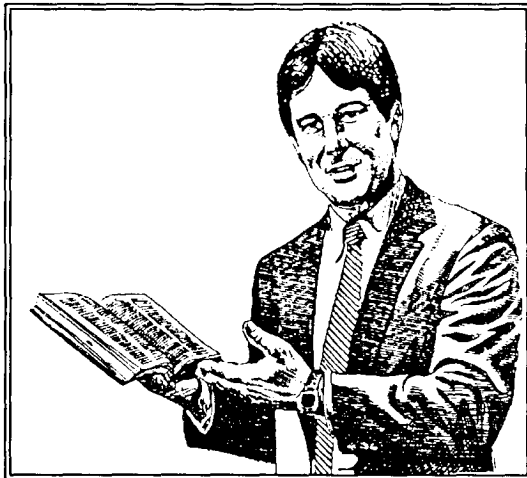
## Preaching

We have heard of a business meeting where some disgruntled members presented the elders with the reasons for wanting to change preachers. One offered, "My daughter says he preaches too long."

The elders weren't too impressed with that, but suggested they might ask the man to plan his lessons for a better use of time.

A second complained, "But my wife says he preaches too loud." The elders thought they might turn down the public address system and solve that weighty problem.

And the third said, "The bad thing is, the liberals just don't like him." Well, now, that is going to be a bit harder to handle. It makes me think of a bumper sticker: "Get a taste of religion — BITE A PREACHER." The



man who devotes his full time to preaching deserves better than that.

There are bound to be good and bad preachers — and some who should be doing something else. But aside from the "professionals" and the con-men who think it is an easy way of making a living, preachers are a pretty decent lot. With the education, drive, and self-confidence necessary to make a reasonably successful preacher, a man can make more money and have a less demanding life doing something else. That is why those who are in it for the money usually drop out in eight or ten years and get into some other field.

It takes a good man, Charlie Brown, to go right on doing research, preparing the sort of lessons you and your elders feel are most needed, and presenting them to an audience of note-passing teenagers, sleeping parents, ceiling-gazing gum chewers, and a liberal sprinkling of crying babies and their struggling mothers. More than once I have had the temptation to close the book and shout, "OK, you win, you can have it!"

And then I see the sober, thoughtful look on this teenager; the nod of approval on that parent; and a young mother comes to me after service with an apology for her child and a request for a copy of my outline so

she can study it when the child sleeps. If there are problems that fret and discourage us, there are also people who need the Lord and are appreciative of our efforts to bring the two of them together. When you speak of good and bad preachers—

remember the good and bad people they work with, and the fact that, despite rumors to the contrary, preachers are people.

Mothers and Dads, encourage your boys to accept the challenge of the greatest "service" job on earth. —By Robert F. Turner, via *The Exton Exhorter*

## Schedule of Services

### Sundays:

Bible Classes . . . . . 9:45 a.m.

Worship . . . . . 10:45 a.m.

Worship . . . . . 6:00 p.m.

### Wednesdays:

Bible Class . . . . . 10:00 a.m.

Bible Classes . . . . . 7:30 p.m.

### Fultondale Church of Christ

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