

Sunday Best

By: David Burruss

As Christians, one of our greatest responsibilities is to speak the truth in love. That means we must be careful not to add to God's Word or take away from it. And sometimes, that means taking a hard look at certain traditions we've accepted over the years. One tradition that deserves a closer look is the idea that we must dress in our "Sunday best" to properly worship God.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with dressing nicely. If someone wants to wear a suit or a dress to church, that's completely fine. What I am saying is that we cannot teach this as if it's a commandment. It isn't. The idea that a man must wear a tie or a woman a dress in order to serve or worship sincerely is simply not found in the New Testament. It's a tradition of men, not a truth of God.

The Bible never commands Christians to wear formal clothing to worship. It doesn't say that casual dress is irreverent or that God is more pleased with Western-style fashion. If that kind of external standard mattered to God, He would have made it plain in Scripture. But what God consistently points to is the heart.

As 1 Samuel 16:7 reminds us, "For the LORD does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." That truth doesn't fade away when we get to the New Testament. In fact, Jesus and the apostles take it even deeper, shifting the focus entirely to inner humility, sincerity, and spiritual worship.

And when we look at Jesus Himself, we see no signs that He wore anything resembling formal or elite clothing. In John 19:23–24, we're told that the soldiers divided His garments and cast lots for His tunic. His clothing was ordinary, nothing about His appearance was outwardly impressive.

Paul was a tentmaker, not a religious official dressed in fine robes. And John the Baptist? He wore camel's hair and a leather belt. Today, he probably wouldn't even be allowed to lead a prayer in some churches. Yet Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11).

If we judged John's heart based on his clothing, we would have missed what mattered most. That should make us pause.

Some will point to 1 Timothy 2:9–10, where Paul encourages women to dress modestly, with propriety and moderation. And yes, modesty is a biblical principle. But notice that Paul's concern wasn't about being too casual. He was warning against showiness. He specifically cautioned against using clothing to flaunt wealth or social status. Ironically, in our time, formal attire in church can sometimes do exactly that.

And here's something worth asking. If dressing up is really about honoring God, why does it so often only happen on Sunday morning? Why not Sunday night? Why not Bible class on Wednesday, or small group devotionals during the week? The inconsistency suggests it's more about tradition and social pressure than spiritual reverence.

That leads to a deeper question. Who are we trying to impress? Are we dressing for God? For our brethren? For the world?

God sees past every layer of fabric straight into the heart. He is not swayed by a jacket and tie. What matters to Him is obedience, humility, and love.

Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). He didn’t say, “If you love Me, wear a suit.” Respect for God is shown by our lives, not our labels. It’s shown through humble worship, not polished appearances. Some of the most sincere believers I’ve ever known didn’t look particularly dressed up on Sunday, but they were walking faithfully with the Lord every day of the week.

Over the years, I’ve also known plenty of people who dressed the part, week after week, but whose hearts were far from God. They looked sharp in the pew but lived in sin outside the building. That doesn’t mean dressing up is wrong. It just proves that clothing is not a reliable measure of spiritual health. God already told us that. We just have to believe Him.

Sometimes people try to justify “Sunday best” by referring to the priests in the Old Testament. But Christians are not under the Mosaic Law (Romans 7:4). That covenant has been fulfilled in Christ. Under the New Covenant, every believer is a priest (1 Peter 2:5, 9), and there is no command for priestly garments or ritual dress.

To take those Old Testament patterns and bind them on Christians today is to confuse two very different systems. It’s the same mistake people make when they try to reintroduce incense, special buildings, or ceremonial rituals into Christian worship. We’re not under those shadows anymore. We walk in the light of Christ.

That’s why we must be careful not to turn tradition into law. When we start saying things like, “You can’t lead a song unless you’re in a tie,” or, “That person must not love the Lord if they came to church in jeans,” we are crossing into dangerous territory. We are judging based on externals, and we are binding where God has not bound.

Jesus warned about this in Matthew 15:9. “And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” Paul warned about it too, writing in Romans 14:13, “Let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.”

At the end of the day, here’s what Scripture actually teaches us about how to dress. Be modest. Don’t be flashy or prideful. Don’t wear anything that distracts or promotes sin. And don’t use clothing to shame or elevate yourself above others. Beyond that, we are free.

We should never make someone feel unwelcome in worship because they aren’t dressed a certain way. That’s not the spirit of Christ. That’s the voice of human tradition.

So, if you enjoy dressing up on Sunday, by all means, do it with joy. But don’t assume it makes your worship more acceptable than someone else’s. And don’t let tradition become a burden that God never placed on His people.

The heart matters. The truth matters. And the love we show toward one another, regardless of what we’re wearing, is what honors God the most.