

# How a Christian should Dress

A Sermon by Richard Baxter

Though clothing be a consequent of sin, yet now to man in this necessity it is a mercy and a duty, so be it we use it with such cautions as in the foresaid cases is expressed. 1. That our end be the furnishing our frail bodies for the work of God, and the preserving them from that shame, & cold, & hurt which would unfit us for his service. 2. And that our apparel be fitted as near as we can to these ends; that is, to healthful warmth, and comeliness: and that under the name of comeliness we do not fit them to carnal ends, to set us out to the eyes of men, and to raise their esteem of our worth or comeliness of person: but be satisfied if we avoid the shame of nakedness and contemptible unhandsomeness. 3. To which end we should see that we affect not to rise above those of our own rank, nor equal ourselves in apparel with our superiors: but go with the lower sort of our condition. 4. And that we imitate not the fashions of light and vain persons; but keep company in our attire with the most wise and sober, and grave persons about us. 5. And that we bestow no needless cost upon our attire, because we must be accountable for all that God entrusteth us with. 6. And that we change not causelessly. Thus must apparel be used: the cheapest that is warm and comely, according to the fashion of the gravest persons of our rank, and the lowest of them.

But, alas, this childish trifle the Devil hath made a bait of sensuality. The care that people have about it, the cost they bestow on superfluities, their desire to go with the highest of their rank, to say nothing of mutable and immodest fashions, do shew to what end it is that they use it. I desire these kind of people to think of these few things that I shall say to them.

1. This vanity of apparel, is the certain effect of the vanity of your mind: you openly proclaim your selves to be persons of a foolish, childish temper, and poor understanding: Among the most ungodly people, they that have but common wisdom, do look upon this vanity of inordinate apparel as quite below them. And therefore it's commonly taken to be the special sin of women, and children, and light-headed, silly empty men. Those that have no inward worth to commend them to the world, are silly souls indeed, if they think any wise folks will take a silken coat instead of it? It is wisdom, and holiness and righteousness that

are the ornaments of man; and that's his beauty which beautifieth his soul. And do you think that among wise men fine clothes will go instead of wisdom, or virtue, or holiness? You may put as fine clothes upon a fool as upon a wise man: and will that think you make him pass for wise? When a gallant came into the Shop of Apelles that famous painter, to have his picture drawn, as long as he stood silent, the Apprentices carried themselves reverently to him because he shone in gold and silver lace: but when he began to talk, they perceived that he was a fool, and they left their reverence, and all fell a laughing at him. When people see you in an extraordinary garb, you draw their observation towards you, and one asketh, who is yonder that is so fine? and another asks, Who is yonder? and when they perceive that you are more witless and worthless than other folks, they will but laugh at you and despise you. Excess in apparel, is the very sign of folly, that is hanged out to tell the world what you are, as a Sign at an Inn-door acquaints the passenger that there he may have entertainment. You draw folks to suspect that all is not well with you where there needs all this ado. It's sure a sorry house that needeth many props: and a diseased body that needeth so much medicine: And a deformed face that needeth painting: And what is gaudy attire to the body, but such as painting is to the face? If I see artificial teeth in your heads, I must think that you want the Natural ones that were better. If I perceive your breath to be still sweetened by art, I shall suspect that it would stink without it. And if I see people inordinately careful of their apparel, I must need suspect that there is some special cause for it: all is not well where all this care and curiosity is necessary. And what is the deformity that you would hide by this?

Is it that of your mind? Why you betray it more? you tell all that see you, that you are empty, silly souls, as plainly as a Morrice-dancer, or a Stage-player doth tell folks what he is by his attire. Is it the deformities of your bodies that you would hide this way! I confess that's the best excuse that can be made for this excess: For apparel will do more to hide the deformities of the body than of the mind. But the shape of your clothes is fittest for this (so far it is fit to be attempted) For the bravery of them will do little, but draw men's observation the more upon your infirmity. If you say that you have no such extraordinary necessity; then I must say that you do your selves wrong to tice people to suspect it.

2. And also you make an open ostentation of Pride, or Lust, or both, to all that look upon you. In other cases you are careful to hide your sin, and take it for an heinous injury if you

be but openly told of it and reprov'd: How comes it then to pass that you are here so forward your selves to make it known, that you must carry the signs of it open in the world! Is it not a dishonour to Rogues and Thieves, that have been burnt in the hand or forehead, or must ride about with a paper pinned on their backs declaring their crimes to all that see them; So that everyone may see, yonder is a thief, and yonder is a perjured man? And is it not much like it for you to carry the badge of pride or lust abroad with you in the open streets and meetings? Why do you desire to be so fine, or neat, or excessive comely? Is it not to draw the eyes and observations of men upon you? and to what end? Is it not to be thought either Rich, or beautiful, or of a handsome person? And to what end desire you these thoughts of men? Do you not know that this desire is Pride itself? You must needs be somebody; and fain you would be observed and valued; and fain you would be noted to be of the best or highest rank, that you can expect to be reckoned of: And what is this but Pride? And I hope you know that Pride is the Devils sin, the first born of all iniquity; and that which the God of heaven abhors! so that it were more credit for you in the eyes of men of wisdom to proclaim yourselves beggars, sots, or idiots, than to proclaim your pride. And too oft it shews a pang of lust as well as pride: especially in young persons: and few are so forward to this sin as they. This bravery and fineness is but the fruit of a precocious mind; it's plainly a wooing, alluring act: It is not for nothing that they would fain be eyed, and be thought comely or fair in others eyes! somewhat they want: you may conjecture what! And even married people, if they love their credit, should take heed by such means of drawing suspicion upon themselves. Sirs, if you are guilty of folly, pride and lust, your best way is to seek of God an effectual cure, and to use such means as tends to cure it; and not such as tend to cherish it, and increase it; as certainly fineness in clothing doth: But if you will not cure it, for shame conceal it, and do not tell everyone that sees you what is in your heart: what would you think of one that should go up and down the street, telling all that meet him, [I am a thief, or I am a fornicator] would you not think that he were a compound of foolery and knavery? And how little do you come short of this that write upon your own backs, [Folly, Pride and Lust] or tell them by your apparel, [Take notice of me: I am foolish, Proud, and lustful?]

3. And if you be so silly as to think that bravery is a means of honour, you should withal consider that it is but a shameful begging of honour from those that look upon you, when

you shew them not anything to purchase or deserve it. Honour must be forced by desert and worth, and not come by begging; for that is no honour that's given to the undeserving. It is but the shadow of desert, and will constantly follow it among the wise and good, but never go without it. Your bravery doth so openly shew your desire of esteem and honour, that it plainly tells all wise men that you are the less worthy of it. For the more a man desireth esteem, the less he deserves it. And you tell the world by your attire that you desire it: even as plainly and foolishly as if you should say to folks in the streets [I pray think well of me, and take me for an handsome comely person, and for one that is above the common sort.] Would you not laugh at one that should make such a request to you? Why, what do you less, when by your attire you beg estimation from them? And for what I pray you, should we esteem you? Is it for your clothes? Why I can put a silver lace upon a mawkin, or a silken coat on a post, or on an Ass. Is it for your comely bodies? why a wicked Absalom was beautiful, and the basest harlots have had as much of this as you: A comely body, or beautiful face doth oft betray the soul, but never saveth it from hell. And your bodies are never the comelier for your dress, whatever they may seem. Is it for your virtues that you would be esteemed? Why pride is the greatest enemy to virtue, and as great a deformity to the soul as the Pox is to the body: And he that will think you ever the honester for a new suite, or a silver lace, doth as little know what honesty is as your selves. For shame therefore give over begging for esteem, at least by such a means as inviteth all wise men to deny your suit; But either let honour come without begging for, or be without it.

4. Consider also that excess of Apparel doth quite contradict the End that proud persons do intend it for. I confess it doth sometime ensnare a fool, and so accomplish the desires of the lustful: But it seldom attaineth the ends of the proud: For their desire is to be the highlier esteemed, and almost all men do think the meanlier of them. Wise men have more wit, than to think the Taylor can make a wise man or woman, or an honest man or woman, or an handsome man or woman: Good men pity them, and lament their folly and vice, and wish them wisdom and humility. In the eyes of a wise and gracious man, a poor self-denying, humble, patient, heavenly Christian, is worth a thousand of these painted posts and peacocks. And it so falls out that the ungodly themselves do frustrate the proud persons expectations. For as covetous men do not like covetousness in another, because they would

get most themselves, so Proud persons like not Pride in others, because they would not have any to vie with them, or overtop them, and be looked upon and preferred before them. None look with such scorn and envy at your bravery, as those that are as silly and sinful as your selves, who cannot endure that you should excel them in vanity; so that good and bad do ordinarily despise or pity you for that which you think should procure your esteem.

5. Consider also, that Apparel is the fruit or consequent of sin, that laid man naked and open unto shame: and is it fit you should be proud of that which is ordained to hide your shame; and which should humble you by minding you of the sin that caused the necessity of it?

6. And you should bethink you better than most Gallants do, what account you mean to make to God for the money that you lay out in excess of bravery, will it think you be a good and comfortable account, to say, [Lord, I laid out so much to feed and manifest my Pride and Lust] when such abundance of pious and charitable uses did call for all that you could spare? Many a Lord, and Knight, & Gallant bestoweth more in one suit of clothes, or in one set of hangings, or in the superfluous dress of a Daughter, than would keep a family of poor people for a 12 month, or than would maintain a poor Scholar for higher service than ever they themselves will do; And many a poor boy or girl goeth without a Bible, or any good books, that they may lay out all they have on their backs.

7. Lastly, I beseech you do not forget what it is that you are so carefully a doing; and what those bodies are that you so adorn, and are so proud of, and set out to the sight of the world in such bravery. Do you not know your selves? Is it not a lump of warm and thick clay, that you would have men observe and honour? When the soul that you neglect is once gone from them, they will be set out then in another garb That little space of earth that must receive them, must be defiled with their filthiness and corruption: and the dearest of your friends will have no more of your company, nor one smell or sight of you more if they can choose: There is not a carrion in the ditch that is loathsomer than that gallant painted corpse will be a little after death. And what are you in the mean time? Even bags of filth, and living graves, in which the carcasses of your fellow creatures are daily buried and corrupt. There is scarce a day with most of you, but some part of a dead carcass is buried in your bodies, in which as in a filthy grave, they lie and corrupt, and part of them turneth into your substance, and the rest is cast out into filthy excrements. And thus you walk like

painted sepulchres: Your fine clothes are the adorned covers of filth, and phlegm, and dung. If you did but see what is within the proudest Gallant, you would say the inside did much differ from the outside. It may be an hundred worms are crawling in the bowels of that beautiful damsel or adorned fool that set out themselves to be admired for their bravery. If a little of the filth within do but turn to the scab or the small pox, you shall see what a piece it was that was wont to have all that curious trimming.

Away then with these vanities, and be not children all your days; nay be not proud of that which your children themselves can spare! Be ashamed that ever you have been guilty of so much dotage, as to think that people should honour you for a borrowed bravery, which you put off at night, and on in the morning! O poor deluded dust and worms-meat! lay by your dotage, and know your selves: Look after that which may procure you deserved and perpetual esteem, and see that you make sure of the honour that is of God. Away with deceitful ornaments and gawds, & look after the inward real worth. Grace is not set out and honoured by fine clothes, but clouded, wronged and dishonoured by excess. It is the inward glory that is the real glory. The Image of God must needs be the chiefest beauty of man: Let that shine forth in the holiness of your lives, & you will be honourable indeed.

Peter telleth you of such a conversation of women as may win their unbelieving husbands without the word: And what is it? [while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear: whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning, of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel: but the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in old time, the holy women that trusted in God adorned themselves, being in subjection to their husbands, 1 Per. 3. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.