

Thoughts on Ministry of Healing

(22) Dress (pages 287-294)

Summary:

Ellen White's multitude of counsels on dress are here beautifully summarized in terms of large principles of action. In our choice of clothing we will be greatly benefitted by following principles of modesty, economy, simplicity and healthfulness.

Thoughts:

Immodesty is here defined as "any device designed to attract attention to the wearer or to excite admiration." This would no doubt include drawing attention with the absence of normal clothing! (287)

Regarding economy, Ellen White notes that money is a trust from God. It should not be expended for the gratification of pride or ambition. Means that could bring happiness to others should not be expended for needless display. (287-288)

The principle of simplicity is grounded in Jesus statement regarding the "lilies of the field." Dress should be as simple and natural as possible in order to emphasize the "beautiful dress" we can wear upon the soul. This principle emphasizes the character of the wearer. (289-290)

The rest of the chapter focuses on the principle of healthfulness, with further comments on the issue of how money is used. (290-294) In following the latest fashions our dress puts unnecessary pressure on the poorer classes who feel driven to keep up at the expense of health. Chasing after fashion also takes time that could be better spent preserving health, promoting character development, and fostering family relationships. Many fashions are themselves unhealthy, when they expose the body, burden it or constrain it in ways that undermine health. Clearly, in Ellen White's day dress and health were conjoined issues. "Health Reform" was of a piece with "diet reform" as a means establishing and preserving health.

Such a principled approach is much more relevant to us today than the multitude of details that were aimed at specific situations more than a hundred years ago. Ellen White's detailed dress counsels need to be read in light of the principles in this chapter. When it comes to dress, principle is key, after all, Ellen White was encouraging shorter skirts, which today would not be either healthy or modest. So the principled approach of this chapter has enduring value.

A fun story. One faculty member of the School of Religion grew up in a state that was becoming concerned about the general deterioration in dress standards, not just in terms of modesty, but also in terms of appropriateness. They held a contest in the schools, encouraging the students to address how to raise the standards in that state by writing essays on the topic. As a school child the young man researched what Ellen White wrote on the subject and shared it as an essay of his own, without indicating the source. He won the first prize, a brand new suit of clothes! So these principles can be attractive even in mainstream society.

Quotable Quotes:

"Money is a trust from God. It is not ours to expend for the gratification of pride or ambition. In the hands of God's children it is food for the hungry, and clothing for the naked. It is

a defense to the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, a means of preaching the gospel to the poor. You could bring happiness to many hearts by using wisely the means that is now spent for show. Consider the life of Christ. Study His character, and be partakers with Him in His self-denial.” (287)

“But our clothing, while modest and simple, should be of good quality, of becoming colors, and suited for service. It should be chosen for durability rather than display. It should provide warmth and proper protection.” (288)

“(Dress) should have the grace, the beauty, the appropriateness of natural simplicity. Christ has warned us against the pride of life, but not against its grace and natural beauty. He pointed to the flowers of the field, to the lily unfolding in its purity, and said, ‘Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.’ Matthew 6:29. Thus by the things of nature Christ illustrates the beauty that heaven values, the modest grace, the simplicity, the purity, the appropriateness, that would make our attire pleasing to Him.” (289)

“The most beautiful dress He bids us wear upon the soul. No outward adorning can compare in value or loveliness with that ‘meek and quiet spirit’ which in His sight is ‘of great price.’ 1 Peter 3:4.” (289)

Tweets of Healing:

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