

IMAGE ENHANCERS

We are living in a society where the goal of many young people is to try to impress others and make people think highly of them. They do not want to be identified as different from others or to stand for things that others do not stand for. One of those areas is in clothing. Young and older people strive to dress and to look like the people they want to impress, and fear being ridiculed for being old fashioned or conservative in lifestyle, including dress.

In a State of the Union address, former President Bill Clinton noted that teenagers are “killing each other over designer clothes.” For that reason, he advocated school uniforms as a way to cut down on the pressure young people face when going to school.

One school system in California switched to uniforms. Four years later, they did a study of the trends since the switch. They noted a dramatic drop in assaults, thefts, and vandalism. Of course other factors may have been involved, but the biggest change in the school system was a switch to uniforms.

Some educators think uniforms aid in academic achievement “because students aren’t distracted by clothes—theirs or classmates’—and they treat school as their job.”

Of course school uniforms do not solve all problems in schools or elsewhere. However, they can be an aid to keep people from focusing on image enhancement, and to rather focus on the more important things in life.

It is true, more than most people are willing to admit, that our clothing does say a lot about our thoughts and motives and what we want people to think of us. But whom do we want to impress? A society “killing each other over designer clothes”?

Clothing enhancement can, however, be a positive thing. An instructor giving training to a group of religious volunteers who were working in a prison described the importance of dress in relationship to working with prisoners. She stated that the dress and badges of the guards were “image enhancers.” They let the prisoners know who is in charge, and they commanded a certain degree of respect. She even stressed the importance of the religious volunteers being careful and modest in their dress so as to command respect from the prisoners.

The instructor went on to emphasize the importance of prison workers not only wearing “image enhancing” clothes but acting the part. A prison guard or volunteer can bring reproach on his profession and even the way he dresses by acting less than professional. He needs to be kind and respectful toward prisoners but not too chummy with them or give in to their wrongdoing. They can destroy respect for their position and even any “image enhancers” by inconsistent talking or living.

And so, what are we trying to convey with our clothing? It has been said that the way a person dresses makes a “statement” about who he really is inside. Many will argue that clothing has little or nothing to do with what is inside, but it does reflect our attitudes toward ourselves, society’s expectations, authority, and even toward what is right or wrong. Does our clothing or lack of it reflect our attitudes toward what people perceive about us? Are we trying to get people to “like” us? Are we trying to call attention to ourselves and to our bodies?

If we really want to enhance ourselves in the eyes of God and of people, we need to wear clothing that commands respect, that shows we are not trying to call attention to ourselves or lead people to try to emulate us and do what we want them to do. Our focus will be on showing respect to others and obedience to Bible standards of right and wrong and, yes, of personal appearance.

The Bible teaches that we are all made in the image of God. *“God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them”* (Genesis 1:27). That means that we should want to reflect what God expects of us not only by the way we dress, but in every area of our lives. For example, the Bible teaches modesty in clothing. That means that our bodies are well covered with clothing and that we are not calling people to focus on our bodies, but on the principles that we stand for. It is all about our focus for living. *“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array”* (1 Timothy 2:9).

Surrender to God’s will and obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word will truly enhance our image to bless the world by our words and actions.

~Roger Berry