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## TOO FLIP

*Are we raising a generation with a casual attitude toward worship?*

By Tyler Young

There is something a bit incongruous about the scene. The picture shows the President, in all his executive dignity, in the midst of a bevy of smiling, bare-armed co-eds, their sundresses and flip-flops contrasting with the cut of George Bush's suit and tie. When the Northwestern University championship lacrosse team made a visit to the White House for a photo-op last summer, a small controversy centered on the casual dress of the girls. Four of the teammates photographed in the front row with President Bush were donning flip-flops. A Chicago Tribune headline, reporting on the horror of a brother of one of the girls, blared in all caps: "Fashion Footnote: 'You Wore Flip-Flops To The White House?!" The event generated sufficient attention for two of the girls to tell NBC they were going to auction off their offending footwear on eBay.

That the young ladies (and apparently their older chaperones) thought nothing of baring arms and exposing toes at a once-in-a-lifetime meeting with the leader of the free world reveals the growing ignorance of (and often indifference toward or disregard for) decorum, especially among the younger generation. Meghan Cox Gurdon commented on this troubling trend, "You would think that well-brought-up young women would know that flip-flops are inappropriate for any remotely formal event. Chad Pergram, who runs a Washington internship program out of Ohio, recently told The Hill newspaper he finds it necessary to label each intern's daily schedule according to the formality of clothes required (D for Dressy, BC for Business Casual, C for Casual, VC for Very Casual).

It is obvious from a stroll through any mall, or along the National Mall, that relatively few parents now bother to intervene in what their children wear, unless it is maybe to pay for their \$175 low-rise jeans. No one is handing down the proper knowledge because parents are so desperate for their children to be cool and popular. Instructing young women in the suitability of their clothes means having to exercise taste and judgment, and that can mean having to say "No," or even, "I forbid you to leave this house looking like a trollop." Modern adults find putting any brakes on "hipdom" excruciatingly difficult. That is why insisting on a certain elegance in dress – such as, say, demure, closed-toe heels for White House events – is becoming as retrograde as explaining how rings are worn with tea gloves, or when a lady should remove her veil.

Unfortunately, we see this same phenomenon when it comes to the way our young people dress for worship.

Brother Wayne Jackson lamented this situation:

What has happened to the dignity of dress that one would expect to be associated with public worship services? First, there is the matter of flesh exposure. It is not uncommon to see women so scantily clad as to be an embarrassment to godly men who are attempting to focus their attention on the Lord. Some garments are so sprayed-on tight that one holds his brethren in dreadful anticipation that a sudden cough will reveal more than anyone cares to observe.

There also are increasing numbers of men who seem not the least bit troubled about wearing into the worship assemblies tank-tops and cut-offs, as if they are oblivious to the sacred environment into which they have entered.

There is also the matter of common dignity. Apparently, some parents have no sensitivity about how their youngsters dress or else they have lost control almost entirely. Belly buttons are on display and hip-huggers are barely hugging anything... The worship atmosphere is turned into a carnival-like sideshow.

Why is it that the Mormons and “Jehovah’s Witnesses” are easily identifiable by their neat dress styles as they propagandize with their error, yet our people, who are supposed to be interested in spreading the precious gospel of Christ, are some of the sloppiest advertisement in town?

There was a time, years ago, when people would speak of wearing their “Sunday best,” or their “Sunday-go-to-meeting” clothes. Even the most humble farmer had a dress shirt and shoes for worship. Young boys were proud to wear their little suits and ties, and girls their dresses and shoes, so they would look like dad and mom and the adults in the church all dressed up for Sunday. Getting clothes ready and looking “nice” for church services were weekly rituals in most homes in the church. Because worship was thought of as a special time, brethren wanted to look their best.

A glance around our assemblies shows how much times have changed. Frequently we see mom and dad dressed up, but junior is allowed to drag in looking like he is on his way to Six Flags or a backyard bar-b-cue. At other times even our adults, wearing jeans and T-shirts, are not setting much of an example themselves. Can it be long before some of our congregations adopt the practice of some community churches, whose preachers wear sneakers, jeans and golf-shirts, while their members are encouraged to dress anyway they please? If that day has not already arrived, it does not appear to be too far off.

I’m not suggesting it is necessarily wrong to wear a T-shirt to worship or sinful to wear flip-flops to Sunday or Wednesday night services. It is true that the Bible does prohibit immodest apparel both in and out of the assembly, but nowhere does it dictate fashion. There is no formal dress code or fashion guideline to which one must comply in worshipping the Lord. And it’s true, as advocates of completely casual dress for worship are quick to point out, that “the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). However, at the same time we should remember our outward appearance in a reflection of the inward attitude. Dress, to a large extent, is a reflection of one’s heart (Matthew 15:18). How we dress at a given activity can be an indicator of the value we place upon that event.

Certainly we do not want to create the impression that visitors are unwelcome if they are not “dressed up.” When it comes to our young people, we would rather have them here and dressed sloppily than not be here at all. Nevertheless, can parents not set an example of dressing neatly and nicely, and require the same of their children, in order to demonstrate an attitude of respect and reverence which ought to characterize our worship assemblies? More than merely requiring our children to wear modest attire – something parents ought to absolutely demand of their kids at all times, but which some obviously do not – can we not go further? Can we not also show them the Sunday worship assembly is a special time of communion with God and fellowship with the saints, and that therefore it is a good thing to dress our best? If we can dress up for other things is it too much to make the same effort for what ought to be the most important time of our week?

Let us help our youth understand, by precept and example, that when it comes to our worship assemblies, it is not good to be flippant.