

Colorful Cosmetics and Jewelry



By Joe Crews

A FIRE ESCAPE RELIGION

One of the most frequent and mistaken complaints that people make against religion is that it is too restrictive. In this permissive age, when all the emphasis seems to be upon “doing your own thing,” an unreasonable attitude of self-will has developed. This attitude has even intruded into religion. Church members and non-members seem to be in quest of the same thing: a religion that does not interfere with personal rights and freedom. Suspicion is aroused instantly against any doctrine that demands the “giving up” of anything.

As this liberal spirit has grown stronger, many church members have turned more and more critical of the high spiritual standards upheld by the church. Obviously embarrassed by the widening gap between the church and the world, and unwilling to meet the social stigma of being a “peculiar” minority, these members have sought to justify their compromise in the area of Christian standards. They often argue that the church is being narrow and legalistic and that many fine people are being discouraged from joining the church by this “arbitrary imposition of rules.”

If these complaints are valid, then some basic changes surely need to be made in the doctrine of the church. If they are not valid, then we desperately need to know how to present the standards of Christian conduct in their true biblical setting. In other words, we must definitely establish whether these rules were made by God or by the church. We must also find out if they are arbitrary prohibitions or God’s loving regulations for our own happiness.

In contrast to the popular revolt against any absolute law of individual conduct, we must consider the Bible facts about the Christian life in general and morals in particular. How compatible are these modern demands for personal freedom with the standards of God’s Word? Let us suppose that the true biblical position could be presented with all the love and persuasion of an angel from heaven. Would the truth be easy for anyone to accept?

Let’s face it. The path to eternal life is not a soft, flowery way of ease. Jesus laid such emphasis upon this in so many texts that we cannot be blind to it. He said, “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14). One of the very first principles of being a Christian is self-denial. Christ said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). To be a Christian involves complete surrender. Our Lord’s parable of the pearl and the merchantman reveals that we must be willing to invest every single thing we have in obtaining that tremendous prize of eternal life. If we allow one thing or one person to come between us and doing the will of Christ, we cannot be saved.

Have we been guilty of discounting the price of discipleship so that people will not feel that the path is too narrow and restrictive? Jesus said, “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). The rich young ruler was told by Jesus that he lacked only one thing in his preparation for heaven, but that one thing he was not willing to do. He would have to surrender his wealth in order to be saved, but he was not willing to give it away. He loved something more than he loved the Lord, and he went away sorrowful and lost. The position of Christ was so strong on this point that He even said, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37).

Now, I believe that we should search for the kindest, most tactful and loving way to present the claims of Christ to men and women. But I also believe that it will make little difference how it is presented if individuals have no love for the Lord Jesus. The fault does not lie with the message; some of the fault lies with the preachers in the way they present it, but much of the fault lies in the attitude of the complaining Christian who feels rebellious against the truth because it requires a degree of self-denial.

Let me illustrate how personal feelings and attitude can make all the difference in the world. Marriage is the most restrictive experience that any human being can voluntarily assume in this world, aside from his spiritual commitment to Christ. The man promises to surrender many of his former attachments and practices. He yields up his freedom to date other girls, and solemnly binds himself to that one-and-only for the rest of his life. The bride also makes similar restrictive pledges, agreeing to forsake all others in her devotion to the man at her side. The wedding vows are undoubtedly among the most narrow, rigid commitments any human being can make in his lifetime. If restrictions and rules are the cause of so much misery, then weddings should be the most miserable, unhappy experiences for all concerned. But not so! They are the happiest events. Why? Why is the bride so radiant as she stands up to pledge her very life away to the groom? How can the man be so happy to make the promises that will inhibit his activities for the rest of his life? The answer is simple. They love each other. It is their attitude and feeling toward each other that makes the restrictions a joy to accept.

Have you ever heard a bride complaining after the ceremony? Probably no one has ever heard her say bitterly, "Now I can't date Jim and Andy anymore. It's not fair. The State is forcing me to be faithful to my husband. This married business is too restrictive." No, you've not heard that. Public opinion is ready to condemn the bride if she commits adultery, but she doesn't even think of such a possibility. She is in love, and love changes everything. She is not being faithful because of fear of punishment or reproach. She is being faithful because she wants to please the person whom she loves so deeply.

The most miserable men and women in this world are the ones who are married and no longer love each other. Here is almost literally hell on earth. They chafe and complain about the restrictions and impositions upon them. Similarly, the unhappiest church members in all the world are those who are married to Christ through baptism, and yet do not love Him. They are often bitterly blaming the church and their instructors for imposing upon them their narrow, restrictive religion.

But is it the religion or the pastors who are at fault? The sad fact is that those people have never entered the personal love-relationship that is the cornerstone of all true religion. Many of them have learned the right texts for the Bible study course and are quite able to explain the order of last-day events, but they have had no personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Somewhere, and perhaps everywhere, along the lines of the indoctrination they were not taught, or did not choose to accept, the true basis of heart religion. It is not a set of rules or a list of doctrines, but a deeply personal involvement in a love affair with the man Jesus Christ.

The difficulty with millions of Christians is their motive for being church members. They have a fire escape religion. They do certain things only because they are afraid of the fire at the end of the road. They serve the Lord fearfully because they tremble at the thought of being cast into the lake of fire. No wonder they are long-faced and miserable! What a perversion of the truth! Christians should be the happiest people in the world—happier even than the newlyweds as they leave the wedding chapel! The Christian should love the Lord even more than he loves his own wife and family.

Do you think a home could be happy if the wife prepared her husband's favorite dish each day because she feared he might divorce her? Earthly relationships would collapse under this strain. She prepares that dish because she loves her husband and wants to please him. When his wife's birthday approaches, a loving, Christian husband often watches and listens for an indication of what his wife would like to have. And usually

she doesn't have to hit him over the head to let him know! He gladly buys her the gift because he loves her and wants to please her. In the same way, the Christian will be searching the Bible daily to discover ways of pleasing the Lord. He will constantly be looking for signs and indications of how to please the One he loves supremely. In the Twentieth Century translation of the Bible, we read these words, "Always be trying to find out what best pleases the Lord" (Ephesians 5:10). What a motto for every Christian! Indeed, this is the supreme desire of those who love the Lord sincerely. No wonder Christ summarized the first table of the law in these words: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matthew 22:37, 38).

The real reason some Christians chafe and complain about the rules and the strictness is because they have only enough religion to make them miserable. The scope of the Christian "experience" is based upon a constant struggle to live up to the rules—an effort to keep the law. Now certainly there is nothing wrong with obeying the commandments of God any more than there is with a husband obeying the laws to support his wife. But if the demands of the law are the only reason for obeying it, then something is seriously wrong with the Christian and with the husband. Love lifts the legal load and makes delightful what could be a burden and strain.

A mother of three boys was having a terrible struggle trying to enforce the laws of good grooming and cleanliness. Like most little boys, these three resisted the rules about washing ears, combing hair, and shining shoes. It was a daily battle that Mother won only through the long arm of authority and force. But one day the oldest boy, in his early teens, walked out of his room looking the model of impeccable neatness. Every hair seemed to be in exactly the right place, and the shoes below the well-turned cuff were shining to perfection. The mother almost fainted. Hardly able to suppress her surprise and delight, she wisely decided to wait and watch for the answer to this turn of events.

The solution to the puzzle was not long in coming. The very next day Mother learned that a new family had moved in down the block, and there was a girl in the family. Perhaps the girl had not seen Johnny, but he had already seen her and it had profoundly affected him. We'll not say that it was love that changed his attitude toward the laws of good grooming, but he definitely wasn't cleaning up from fear of mother's enforcement any longer.

The point is that the Christian life is not composed of just "DOs" and "DON'Ts." There are restrictions, to be sure, in this spiritual marriage, just as there are in physical marriage. But those restrictions are imposed by love that seeks always and ever to please the object of the affections. Those Christians who are in love with Christ are exuberant, beaming witnesses that this is the way of true happiness. Unfortunately, there is a larger group of church members who are miserably enduring what should be blissfully enjoyed. They are bitter and complaining about not being able to eat what they please or dress as they wish to. They blame the church for their being forced to "give up" so many things. Their religion seems much like the man with a headache. He didn't want to cut off his head, but it hurt him to keep it. Their joyless attitude seems to assume that their religion is the product of some committee of gloomy preachers bent on including all the prohibitive rules that make men, women, and young people unhappy.

But is this true? What about the spiritual principles that make up the doctrine that we call Christian standards? Is it an arbitrary church law that one should not attend the theatre? Is it God's decision or man's decision that modern dancing is improper for a Christian? And what about the use of colorful cosmetics and jewelry—is it pleasing to God or displeasing? The truth is that every point of our faith and doctrine should be based soundly upon the principle of doing God's will as revealed in the Bible. Love for Him will always provide the question, How can I always be trying to find out what best pleases the Lord?

The answer to that question is found in scores of Bible texts that give indications and clear signals on how to please Him rather than ourselves. This is the only really relevant question concerning any activity or practice: What does God think about it? It doesn't matter what this preacher or that preacher thinks of it, or what this church or that church believes about it. The great, all-important question is this: Is it pleasing or displeasing to the Lord? If we find texts that reveal that God doesn't approve, there should be no further debate in the heart of a genuine Christian. We love Him too much to risk displeasing Him. Our delight should be to find and execute those things that please the One we love and to eliminate from our lives those things that displease Him.

When people are in love, they do not need to threaten each other or lay down ultimatums. They constantly search for ways to show their love and to please one another. Those who fulfill the first and great command of Christ will not feel it a burden to obey. God is searching for those who will be sensitive to the slightest indication of His will. He is not pleased by those who must be constantly prodded into line by fear of punishment. God says: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee" (Psalm 32:8, 9, emphasis added).

Many Christians are "bit-and-bridle" followers. They respond only to threats and obey because of fear of punishment. God says, "I want you to be corrected by a look from me." Only those who love Him supremely and are watching for indications of His pleasure will recognize the loving glance of correction. Searching the Bible with one purpose—to discover what pleases Him—they will immediately obey the slightest revelation of His will. This is the essence of true Christianity—ordering every level of life in harmony with His revealed will, because of love.

COLORFUL COSMETICS AND JEWELRY

With this little background on how to make love the motivating factor in setting up Christian standards, we are now prepared to illustrate how the principle operates in practice. Although any one of the "conduct" standards of the church could be used, let us choose one that has evoked considerable complaint—colorful cosmetics and jewelry. Multitudes of sincere members have laid aside the use of these artificial adornments "because the church says so." This is a poor reason for doing anything in the Christian life. Hopefully, after reading this chapter, the explanations about arbitrary church rules on the subject will give way to personal conviction based on loving and pleasing the Lord.

Repeatedly, pastors have faced the questions: "What is wrong with my little wedding ring? Do you think God will leave me out of heaven just because I wear this bit of jewelry?" My own heart has been dismayed and troubled on many occasions over this negative approach to Christianity. Please note what the question implies: The questioner is obviously seeking to know how much he can get by with and still make it to heaven. His attitude reflects a legalistic desire to do only the things that are laid down as divine "do-it-or-else" laws.

But this approach is wrong, wrong, wrong! The true Christian will not ask, "How much do I have to do in order to remain a child of God?" but rather, "How much can I do to please Jesus whom I love?" This is the positive approach based on seeking God's will on the question and loving Him enough to obey His will happily as revealed in the Bible. Once this open-hearted, loving premise is accepted, it remains only to search through the Scripture to find indications of God's will concerning the use of colorful cosmetics and ornaments. This we shall now proceed to do.

In Genesis 35:1-4, Jacob was told by God to take his family to Bethel where they were to be presented at the altar of the Lord. This was a very sacred spot to Jacob—the place of his conversion in earlier days, after seeing the heavenly ladder in his dream. But before they could be consecrated at that holy spot, Jacob told his household to "put away the strange gods that are among you" (verse 2). Apparently, the family had picked up

some of the heathen customs in their tarrying in the land. There were certain objects that had to be laid aside before they went up to the altar, because they were pagan objects. Please notice, in verse 4, what these objects were: "And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all the earrings which were in their ears: and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem." In Judges 8:24, we are assured that earrings were worn by those who were Ishmaelites. The context strongly implies that they wore ornaments as a mark of their apostasy from the true God. Genesis 34 reveals that Jacob's sons had committed some grievous sins, and Jacob was coming before God to make a solemn atonement for them and for his family. It was a time of heart-searching and repentance. Everything was done to make wrong right and to open the way for God's blessing to come upon them. The custom of wearing heathen ornaments was given up, along with the strange gods. The earrings were laid aside.

Under similar circumstances a reformation took place in Exodus 32:1-6. A terrible apostasy had developed in the previous chapter while Moses was in the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments. A large number of the Israelites had worshipped the golden calf, bringing plague and destruction that threatened the nation. Moses called for them to repent with these words: "Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day" (Exodus 32:29).

In the next chapter, Moses went up to the tabernacle to plead with God for the people, who were still adorned with their heathen trappings from the day of indulgence and sin. The instruction God gave for the restoration of Israel included a change of dress, just as it had earlier in the case of Jacob and his family. God said, "Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a stiff-necked people; I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee. And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the Mount Horeb" (Exodus 33:5, 6).

We are left in no doubt as to the attitude of God concerning the wearing of those ornaments. God, who changes not, told them to take off those things and present themselves for judgment, to answer for their apostasy. It is of more than passing interest to note that this prohibition was laid down in connection with their going into the Promised Land. God said, "I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite ... for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people" (Exodus 33:2, 3). It is significant that they were required to strip off the ornaments before they could enter the Promised Land. Does this have anything to do with us? Indeed it does. Paul assures us in 1 Corinthians 10:11 that "all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." He likens their Red Sea experience to baptism in verse 2, and in verses 7 and 8 he refers to the great apostasy experience of Israel in Exodus 32, when they made their golden calf. Then immediately he explains in verse 11 that these things that happened to them were for "our admonition." This can only mean that God's dealing with them over their apostasy is to teach us something. His command for them to remove the ornaments before going into the land of Canaan applies to us before going into the heavenly Canaan. The parallel is obvious in the context.

The earliest record in existence concerning the use of colorful cosmetics is found in 2 Kings 9:30. Many have questioned the origin of the expression "painted up like Jezebel." The answer is found in this text: "And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out a window." The history of that infamous heathen queen, who put hundreds of God's prophets to death, is well known to Bible students. To trace the biblical origin of the custom to Jezebel certainly casts an unholy shadow over the practice. But we shall see in a moment that the use of colorful cosmetics was a consistent mark of heathen women and unfaithful women throughout the Bible record.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God sent one of the most scathing denunciations of jewelry that can be found anywhere in the Bible. Nowhere do we find a more direct and unequivocal revelation of God's feelings toward

the wearing of ornaments. In Isaiah 3:16 God does not generalize about ornaments, but gives a long list of specific articles that were being worn by the “daughters of Zion.” Now, let’s notice whether God, the same yesterday, today, and forever, was pleased with the wearing of these things. “Moreover the Lord saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet ... in that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, ... the chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, ... the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels” (Isaiah 3:16-21).

Let’s pause in the midst of this recital and ask the question, how will God take away these things? In the next chapter, verse 4, we read, “When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion ... by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.” Don’t overlook the fact that God refers to all these objects of adornment as “filth.” He further describes most graphically the ones who survive the “washing away” of the ornament, “In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem” (Isaiah 4:2, 3).

In bold, clear strokes, the prophet reveals the abhorrence of God for the manifestations of pride in wearing ornaments. After the washing away of those artificial baubles, God describes the women as being “comely,” “holy,” and “beautiful.” Apparently, He does not appraise beauty in the same way that we do. The women put on all their jewelry to make themselves beautiful, but God said it was filthy. When it was all washed away, He said they were comely and beautiful. Do not miss the extreme significance of this truth. God uses that word “comely” to describe His Bride, the Church. “I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman” (Jeremiah 6:2).

As if to reinforce His assessment of the inordinate pride displayed in His people, God made the following observation: “The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves” (Isaiah 3:9). No question is permitted to remain about the shamefulfulness of outward adornment.

It will be well to take note at this point that God identified rings as part of the “filth of the daughters of Zion.” What kind of rings was he talking about? High school seniors will answer immediately, “My class ring is symbolic of my being a senior. It’s not worn as an ornament. God was talking about other kinds of rings.” The Mason will defend his Masonic ring in almost the same words: “God wasn’t talking about my ring. It simply represents my belonging to the Lodge.” And then there are the birthstone rings, the engagement rings, and the wedding rings—they also have symbolic meanings. How easy to justify the one we happen to be wearing, and to claim that God was not talking about that one. But how do we know God wasn’t talking about the very one we are wearing? Would it not be presumptuous to feel that God makes an exception for the one we are wearing, just because we don’t want to give it up?

What did God mean when He said “rings?” Did He mean only certain kinds of rings?

I asked my mother a similar question one day. You see, she had forbidden me to take any icing off the cake after it was frosted. I was permitted to “lick the pan” by scraping up all that Mother left in the bottom of the container, but it was a law of the house that I could not remove any from the cake.

But one day Mother went to the store and left me alone with a beautiful, fresh-made chocolate cake in the middle of the table. I watched the luscious icing ooze down the side of the cake and collect on the rim of the

plate. The temptation was too great, and I quickly scraped up all that excess icing on my finger—but not quickly enough. Just at that moment Mother walked through the door.

Believe me, Mother hauled me off to the bedroom very quickly while I tried to forestall the inevitable. I still remember the crux of my fast talk to escape punishment. Mother said, “I told you never to take any icing off the cake.” Triumphantly I replied, “But you didn’t say chocolate cake.”

Somehow, my wise Mother was not the least impressed with that less-than-sound bit of juvenile logic. I wonder how it might sound to our all-wise Heavenly Father when we say, “But you didn’t say wedding ring.” And that is true. Mother just said “cake,” and God just said “rings,” and to quibble over what kind is but a childish attempt to justify our obvious violation of God’s revealed will.

After all, why are we searching the Bible on the subject? Are we not trying to find out what best pleases the Lord? We are not seeking for ways to get around what pleases Him. Our sole purpose is to find His will in order to do it. We love Him too much to risk displeasing Him. This is why the true Christian will not quibble over the kind of ring or seek a rationalization in going contrary to God’s will. Lay aside all rings. Isn’t it patently obvious that if one symbolic ring can be defended, then all symbolic rings can be defended? In no instance do we find any biblical precedent for wearing a physical sign of marriage. The history of the wedding ring is tainted with pagan sun-worship and papal superstition. Not one argument put forward in its favor carries any weight in comparison to the one great fact that it is not pleasing to the Lord! A carnal Christian could argue that it is not clear that one will be lost for wearing a ring. But the Christian who loves God supremely will answer that it is enough to know that it displeases our Friend.

Incidentally, history gives us a very clear picture of the relationship between early church apostasy and the introduction of the wedding ring. The famous Catholic Cardinal John Henry Newman described it in 1845 in his monumental book *Development of Christian Doctrine*, p. 373: “Constantine, in order to recommend the new religion to the heathen, transferred into it the outward adornments to which they had been accustomed in their own. It is not necessary to go into a subject which the diligence of Protestant writers has made familiar to most of us. The use of temples, and these dedicated to particular saints ... incense ... candles ... holy water ... processions ... the ring in marriage, turning to the east, images at a later date ... are all of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church” (emphasis added).

The prophet Jeremiah, like so many other Old Testament writers, added more counsel concerning the type of people who wore artificial ornaments. God moved upon those holy men to represent the church prophetically as a woman. When God’s people were backslidden, they were portrayed by the prophet as a harlot or an unfaithful wife. Thus we read texts like the following: “And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do? Though thou clothest thyself with crimson, though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; thy lovers will despise thee, they will seek thy life” (Jeremiah 4:30).

Through Ezekiel, God symbolized His apostatized people, Judah and Israel, by two harlots named Aholah and Aholibah. His description of their bold ornamentation matched the lewdness of their conduct. “And furthermore, that ye have sent for men to come from far, unto whom a messenger was sent; and, lo, they came: for whom thou didst wash thyself, paintedst thy eyes, and deckedst thyself with ornaments” (Ezekiel 23:40).

Hosea expresses the same thought when he describes the hypocrisy of Israel. Again, the unfaithfulness was well dramatized by a decorated woman. “And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord” (Hosea 2:13).

Over and over again, the Bible connects the wearing of colorful cosmetics and jewelry with sin, apostasy, and heathenism. When they turned away from the Lord they put on the ornaments that, as Isaiah said, “declare their sin.” There is no lack of texts that spell out the truth clearly and without equivocation—the great God of heaven was displeased with those things and used them to symbolize departure from His will.

Turning to the New Testament, the picture comes into even sharper focus. John, in the book of Revelation, describes the scarlet woman of sin (symbolizing the false church) as “decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication” (Revelation 17:4).

In contrast, the true church is depicted in Revelation 12:1 as a beautiful woman clothed with the glory of the sun. This woman is called the bride of Christ in Revelation 21:9. Notice that no ornaments are worn by the bride of Christ. These types of the true and the false religious systems also point out the estimate God places upon the use of artificial adornment.

Two final texts from the writings of Peter and Paul will reveal the firm, consistent views of the early church concerning this practice. Both of these stalwarts occupied positions of influence among the disciples, and their Spirit-filled letters represent the unchallenged view of the apostolic church. Paul wrote, “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; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works” (1 Timothy 2:9, 10).

Peter wrote in much the same manner, except that he especially addressed Christian women who had unbelieving husbands. “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; 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 let it be 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” (1 Peter 3:1-4).

These words of Peter contain counsel for every Christian wife in the church today, and they deal with one of the most perplexing problems that faces Christian women whose husbands are not with them in the faith. How far should the believing wife go in trying to please her unregenerate husband? To what degree should she compromise the truth of God in little things to keep things smooth at home and possibly to help win her husband? Peter’s advice is simple and clear-cut: Don’t compromise truth and principle at all. Even if the wife is not permitted to speak about her faith, she can win her husband by her “chaste conversation.” Other translations use the more proper term “conduct” instead of “conversation.”

But notice how the conduct of the Christian wife will manifest itself. Peter asserts that she will win her husband much more readily by laying aside the outward adornment. Surely the Spirit of God anticipated the dilemma of the wife who feels that she needs to wear a wedding ring to please her husband, even though she knows it does not please the Lord. This text makes it exceedingly clear that God should come first, and that such a decision also will do more to win the husband than any other course. Hundreds of evangelists and pastors could bear witness that this is true. The women who eventually lead their husbands into the faith are the ones who hold firmly to the standard of God’s Word. The ones who do not win their companions are those who will let down the standard in little things to be more compatible with their unbelieving husbands.

This might seem contradictory, but the practical results are demonstrable. As long as the wife is not living up to

all the points of her own belief, the husband figures that it must not be very important. He cannot get excited about doing something that does not even claim the full compliance of his sweet, Christian wife. But if she does take a firm stand to please the Lord above all others, even in the face of his own displeasure, the husband is deeply impressed that this “religion bit” must be important. He probably will say nothing about his true feelings. He might, in fact, affect great indignation, but his respect and admiration will be secretly stirred by the firm, conscientious stand of his wife.

We must anticipate right here the argument that is advanced by the wives who are not inclined to part with their wedding rings. They say, “I don’t want to give up my ring because it shows that I am married. I’m proud of my husband. I want everyone to know that I’m married. I think marriage is a most sacred and important thing.” No one can find fault with these sincere sentiments. Every wife should love her husband and be proud of him. Marriage is important, and she should want everyone to know that she is married. But let’s ask this question: Is there anything in a person’s life that is more important than marriage? Yes, there is just one thing that is more important than being married to a husband or wife, and that is to be married to Christ. The claims of Christ’s love are the only claims that should ever take priority over the love of husband and wife. In the light of all the overwhelming Bible evidence, we have discovered that ornaments are displeasing to the Lord. It is true that the wedding ring will tell everyone that the wife is married to her husband, but it will also tell something else. It will tell that she has chosen to please her husband even above the Lord Jesus. It will reveal that she is placing someone else’s will above the Bible-revealed will of God. As such, it bears a wrong testimony to the world.

Some might object that such a conclusion is too strong. Some are bound to say, “You are judging and testing my Christianity by a little thing like a ring or an ornament.” No, this is not the case. It is love for God that is being tested, and the Bible clearly points out the criteria for the test. That test not only involves keeping the plainly revealed commandments of God, but also includes laying aside everything else that we discover does not please Him. Here is the evidence: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22).

Please do not overlook the two things that true Christians will always be doing. They obey the direct, overt requirements that God lays down in His law, but they also go further by searching out everything that would please Him. In other words, they will obey the injunction to “always be trying to find out what best pleases the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:10, 20th Century Translation). Jesus exemplified and dramatized this divine principle in His own life and teachings. He said, “The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29). The arbitrary commandments are obvious even to a carnal man, but the little things that please God are revealed only to the loving heart of the Christian who searches the Word for indications of His will. It is a solemn fact that those who will be saved at the coming of Jesus are symbolized by Enoch, who “was translated that he should not see death ... for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Hebrews 11:5). Paul describes the glorious coming of Christ in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. In the same text, he portrays the resurrection of the righteous dead and the catching up of the righteous living. But speaking of those saints who should be ready for translation, Paul said, I “exhort you by the Lord Jesus ... how ye ought to walk and to please God” (1 Thessalonians 4:1). One of the marks of those who are redeemed out of the earth is their willingness to please the Lord in everything.

Listen, if you know a certain thing is pleasing to the Lord, and yet you refuse to do it, what are you really doing? You are pleasing someone else above the Lord. You might say, “But it’s such a small, small thing.” Of course, it is a small thing, but love is actually tested and proven by the little things we do for one another. Ask any housewife if it isn’t so. Her husband might give her a washing machine on her birthday, and she would appreciate it. But if he brings home flowers in the middle of the week and says, “Honey, let me dry the dishes for you,” any wife will tell you that it means more than the washing machine. Why? Because it reveals more of his true feelings to do the little things than to do big things that are more-or-less expected. God is pleased when

we keep His Ten Commandments, but we really show our love more by going beyond the commandments, to please Him in the little things that are revealed in the Bible.

Right and wrong never have been, and never should be, measured by the amount. It is the quality of sin, not the quantity, that presents the largest problem to the Christian. The Bible reveals the fact that colorful cosmetics, rings, etc., are displeasing to the Lord. The Word of God does not reveal that a certain quantity of colorful cosmetics is wrong or that a certain type or number of rings is displeasing to Him. Even the smallest deliberate violation of the revealed will of God is serious. It indicates an inward rebellion against placing God first. The devil's favorite argument today is "a little bit is all right." This was Lot's foolish argument when he was ordered by the angels to flee into the mountains. He begged for permission to go into another city close by Sodom and Gomorrah. His argument was, "Is it not a little one?" (Genesis 19:20). Can you understand why he wanted to go into another city after losing everything he had in Sodom? Yet the same rationalization is used by many Christians today. They debate and quibble over the size of their ring or the amount of the immodesty.

Satan is delighted to hear people trying to decide just how much they should violate the will of God. Never forget this: It is not the degree of the deviation from the Bible standard that is so important, but it is the fact that there is a deviation that constitutes the real problem. The size of the step is not the thing of greatest importance, but rather the direction in which the step leads.

Sometimes ministers are accused of making a big issue out of the wedding ring because they wait for the candidate to remove it before being baptized. Actually, experience has proven that the ring is not the problem at all. The ring is merely the symptom of a much more serious problem: the lack of full surrender. When the heart is yielded, and God is made first in the life, no convert will allow a little ring to stand in the way of uniting with the body of Christ by baptism. When love for Christ is stronger than love of self or husband or wife, then nothing will stand in the way, least of all a small metal ring.

STUMBLING BLOCKS

In this final chapter, we shall give consideration to another aspect of biblical evidence on this subject that some consider to be the most persuasive of all. It answers the objection raised by the few who are still unconvinced that jewelry is displeasing to God. In the most explicit manner, it demolishes the last stronghold of defense for even the wedding ring.

Before moving into Paul's eloquent discourse on this point, let us establish a fact that is well known to all who are engaged in full-time soul winning. Those who persist in wearing their ornaments, after becoming members of the church, have been responsible for placing a stumbling block in the path of interested souls. Almost any evangelist or pastor could break your heart with stories of men and women who were turned back almost at the baptism by the inconsistency of a few church members. After being taught the full Bible truth about Christian standards, these candidates are shocked to see church members, and sometimes church officers, wearing rings or other adornment. Many drop back in disappointment and refuse to join the church at all.

Someone is bound to object, "Well, they should not be looking at people so much. They ought to accept the truth because it is the truth." This is very good and true, but just remember that we are dealing with souls who are searching for loopholes around the unpopular message of the Bible. It is our business to close every loophole patiently and meet every argument so that they finally surrender in full obedience. The fact is that these people have a right to expect the church to be practicing what it preaches. A few inconsistent members can counteract months of prayerful study and preparation of candidates on the part of the pastor. It isn't right that anyone should be a stumbling block to another individual.

Paul penned the most solemn warning to those who would discourage a single soul in their Christian growth.

“Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way” (Romans 14:13). Jesus spoke out on the very same topic, except that He described the enormity of causing a child to stumble. Perhaps His words will have more meaning for us if we read them with the children’s Sabbath School teachers in mind. “Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged around his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). Serious words indeed! But no more serious than the offense it describes—the misleading of little children who look to teachers as examples. How often have little girls questioned the Bible standards about rings after seeing a ring on the finger of a favorite teacher?

In one particular church, a kindergarten teacher who wore a wedding ring was idolized by a little girl in her department. During the church service, the child would often be permitted to sit with the teacher and her husband. Since they had no children of their own, the couple was delighted to have the well-behaved little girl sit with them. She would usually occupy herself with things in the teacher’s purse, but being of an affectionate nature, she would cling to the hand of her teacher much of the time. One Sabbath during the sermon, the woman glanced down at the little girl and noticed she had slipped off the wedding ring and placed it around her small finger. Somewhat perturbed, she recovered the ring and put it back on her own finger.

Week by week, much to her chagrin, she noticed how obsessed the tot seemed to be with the ring. She fondled and caressed the ring and often tried to remove it unobtrusively, so that she could slip it around her childish fingers. The growing fascination of the little girl for the golden circle became an increasing concern to the older woman. Knowing the Bible teachings about ornaments, her conscience had not been at ease from the time she had started wearing the ring. Now she was unable to enjoy the worship service, as she sought to divert the girl’s vain attention from the article of adornment.

At last she could bear it no longer. Under deep conviction that she was placing a stumbling block in the path of the child, she removed the offending ring once and for all. Later, she related the experience to her pastor and described the feelings of guilt that tormented her for placing temptation before the face of an innocent little girl.

“But I don’t see anything wrong with rings. Why should I be a hypocrite and take them off just to impress someone?” This is a question that Paul answers with devastating effect in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. That entire chapter is concerned with the problem of foods offered to idols. The early church was seriously divided over the issue. The Gentile Christians who had come in from paganism believed that it was wrong to eat such meat. They remembered offering the food in sacrifice to idols. Even though they were now Christians, they still felt it was somehow giving allegiance to the idol to eat the food. On the other hand, the Jewish Christians who had come into the church from Judaism felt that the food was perfectly good to eat. Since the meat was not “unclean” and since it was sold along with other meats in the marketplace, the Jewish Christians bought it with no question of conscience whatever.

The contention became so severe between the two groups that Paul finally had to deal with it at considerable length in 1 Corinthians 8. Notice his decision in the matter: “As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. ... Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. ... But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ” (verses 4-12).

These tremendous verses, with their spiritual focus on love for others, apply with even greater force to those who feel at liberty to wear rings in the church. The application is stronger because the ornaments are condemned by God, whereas the meats offered to idols were not condemned. Still, Paul said it was a sin to eat such food because it was a stumbling block, or hindrance, to someone else. Since the rings have been stumbling blocks in the same way to other fellow Christians, we cannot escape the conclusion that such an offense is also a “sin against Christ.”

This brings us right back to the central theme of this little book—love. Whether we are looking at Christian standards from the viewpoint of loving and pleasing God or loving our neighbor, the result is just the same. The whole idea is to put self last of all. A religion based upon such love will not be satisfied merely to fulfill the letter of the Ten Commandments but will search the Word of God daily for indications of His will. As John reminds us: “We keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22, emphasis added).

May I ask a question concerning what you have read up to this point? Has it raised a doubt about the wearing of ornaments? Does the evidence of all these verses, scattered through the Bible, suggest that the practice is open to question? One couple said, “We are not convinced yet that God would keep us out of heaven for wearing a piece of jewelry.” I asked them, “Even though you don’t feel you would be lost by wearing it, do the many texts raise at least some question about the practice meeting the full approval of God?” “Oh, yes,” they said, “We cannot say that the issue is not a bit cloudy.” My next question was this: “Do you think there is a 10 percent chance that wearing your ring could be displeasing to God?” After thinking a moment, they both agreed that there was at least that much chance that it was questionable. Then I asked them this question: “As you stand on the brink of baptism and the complete surrender of your lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, do you want to run a 10 percent chance of displeasing the Lord who has laid down His life for you?”

Slowly they reached down and began to remove their rings. “No,” the husband said, “We don’t want to run the smallest chance of displeasing Him. We want to go all the way with Jesus. Since there is a doubt, we’ll give Him the benefit of the doubt.”

I will not try to pretend that this kind of surrender is easy. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23). Saying “no” to self is what the Master was talking about. He was saying that everyone will have to battle it out with something that self doesn’t want to surrender. The individual who is coming to Christ and learning His ways will have to deny self and say “no” to something that his whole nature craves to keep. That is what self-denial means. Some people fail the test at one point, and others at a different point. I have seen some who could not deny self on the point of money. To obey God might jeopardize their job or cut their salary, and they were not willing to say “No” to their love of money. Others had to give up friends to go all the way in following Christ, and they were not willing to deny themselves their friends. Appetite has stood in the way of many who were not willing to deny themselves the alcohol, tobacco, or unclean foods as required in the Bible. A few have failed the test on the point of vanity and pride. They have been unwilling to deny themselves the inordinate pride of dress.

It is always interesting to see how the truth weeds people out of an evangelistic audience. No one drops out until we present the claims of God that demand a change of life and practice. If we did not preach all the counsel of God, most listeners would gladly respond to the invitation. Struggle takes place when the truth challenges a darling self-indulgence. The tests of the Sabbath, tithe, and diet are all aimed at some element of the self-nature. Many fail on each of these points. But strangely enough, the greatest battle seems to ensue when God’s will touches the area of personal pride. Vanity is deep and pervasive. Self-love has a thousand faces and exhibits itself in as many subtle ways.

Mark it down, somewhere along the line for every soul the devil will use self to make a last desperate stand against the will of God. Only those who love Christ with all their heart, soul, and mind will be able or willing to make the 100-percent surrender to Him that is required. The happiest people in the world are those who let nothing stand in their way of pleasing God in everything.

It has already been mentioned that Christians who live to please the Lord are the happiest people in the world. Jesus said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:10, 11, emphasis added). No wonder, then, that fully committed Christians are so easily recognized. There is a holy radiance and joy shining from within that even transforms the countenance. Although they have laid aside the adornment of the world, they have put on another adornment of the Spirit, which identifies them instantly. Some women feel almost naked after removing their jewelry, but very soon they recognize that God has replaced the artificial with the real. David wrote, "They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed" (Psalms 34:5).

It is this "new look" of the new-born Christian that has caused the world to marvel. For every evil thing that is given up, the child of God receives a spiritual replacement. As Paul said, "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Romans 13:12). And please notice how dramatic this exchange can be when it involves the clothes and adornment of an individual. The bride of Christ receives special attention. Isaiah contrasts the marriage dress of God's people with the dress of the world. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath covered me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10). When we are married to Christ and take His name, we are not to adorn ourselves as worldly brides and bridegrooms. We are joyfully to be clothed with the "garments of salvation" and the "robe of righteousness." This is what lightens the face and presents the new radiant appearance that amazes the world.

This vital point should be given careful consideration. The face has much to say about a person's character and experience. Our most powerful Christian witness may simply be the witness of our shining countenance. One of the most convincing arguments I have ever heard against the use of colorful cosmetics was based upon this very fact. Frances Parkinson Keyes, the well-known Catholic author, explained why she had never "touched up" her face or hair with artificial adornment: "A quarter century of living should put a great deal into a woman's face besides a few wrinkles and some unwelcome folds around the chin. In that length of time she has become intimately acquainted with pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow, life and death. She has struggled and survived, failed and succeeded. She has lost and regained faith. And as a result she should be wiser, gentler, more patient and more tolerant than she was when she was younger. Her sense of humor should have mellowed, her outlook should have widened, her sympathies should have deepened. And all this should show. If she tries to erase the imprint of age, she runs the risk of destroying, at the same time, the imprint of experience and character" (Words of Inspiration, p. 198).

What a tremendous truth is contained in that statement! Christian women have a witness to bear by the expression of their faces. Righteousness, dignity, purity, and calm faith in God—these attributes are often clearly revealed by the countenance alone. Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when He said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven" (Matthew 5:16). The spiritual light and radiance of an unadorned face might even attract more attention to the religion of Jesus Christ than a dozen sermons or Bible studies.

We have spent considerable time on the subject of artificial adornment in order to demonstrate how love leads to the Bible so that we can search out what pleases the Lord. We could just as well have used other examples

of Christian standards. The same principles provide the motivation for seeking always to please Him in what we do about provocative dancing, movies, gambling, diet, and dress. It could be shown just as clearly that these high standards of the church are not based upon any committee of men, but upon the revealed will of God in His Word. May God help us to find our greatest joy and delight in doing the things that please Him.

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