

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ADORNMENT: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research has been a rewarding experience and I would like to thank the Lord for enabling me to complete it.

I would specially like to thank Rev. T. S. Rajasekar, my research mentor for his valuable time and insightful suggestions, which enabled me to sharpen the focus of my research.

I would like to thank Pastor Arthur Renz, who helped me by collecting articles and books on this topic and for all the encouragement and support.

I would also like to thank the Lord for Mr. and Mrs. Rudy Rodrigues, Dr. and Mrs. Higgins, Bro. Dan and Sr. Inez Kent, and Pastor Arthur Renz who made it possible for my wife and me to study at SABC.

I would like to thank my wife Sonia for her love, encouragement and prayers that have enabled me to complete this research work.

INTRODUCTION

John Stott in his book entitled ‘Understanding the Bible’, quotes Dr. Alan Cole, who says, “God sometimes blesses a poor exegesis of a bad translation of a doubtful reading of an obscure verse of a minor prophet.”¹ Though this is true to a great extent, it in no way exonerates us from the task of thorough Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. Paul’s admonition to Timothy of “rightly dividing the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15) is crucial for each of us today, who would be involved in expounding the truths of God’s holy Word.

Some may look at the title of this research and wonder why one would spend time and effort researching on such a subject. They would probably surmise that the use of adornment is something trivial, and thus question the relevance of such an endeavour. Let me briefly share why I chose to do this research paper on this particular issue.

I grew up in a Godly home, where God’s Word was never taken lightly. The catchword at our home was “If it is in the Bible you better do it”. There were no questions asked, no reason why, one just was asked to believe and accept! I am really grateful to the Lord for all the things that were instilled in me during those formative years. I wouldn’t be in ministry but for the Godly influence of my late parents. However as I studied the Word of God I later discovered that in certain instances we were guilty of ‘reading into the text what we wanted it to say’. Though there were few such issues we read meaning into, I have looked at the issue of the use of adornment in the Bible. The reason I believe that research on this subject is pertinent is because an imbalanced perspective on the same would adversely affect the

¹ John Stott, *Understanding The Bible*, 7th edn. (Mumbai: GLS, 2002), 156.

growth of the church of tomorrow. There are numerous churches all over India who are still convinced that wearing adornment is unscriptural and sinful.

In the first chapter of this research I have dealt with few foundational principles of proper interpretation. I have also looked at few passages in the scripture, which people who take an anti-adornment stand erroneously use, as instances to prove their position. The second chapter deals with the use of adornment in the Old Testament. In this chapter few key passages with references to jewelry are dealt with, with particular emphasis on the sociological and cultural aspects of the use of adornment in the Old Testament. In the third chapter I have dealt with two key passages in the New Testament that deals with adornment. As both these passages are used extensively to advocate nonuse of jewelry, I have looked at various commentaries and lexicons to derive a proper understanding of these passages in the Greek.

Let me be forthright in stating that though I seek to look for a Biblical position on the use of adornment, my knowledge of Hebrew and Greek is very elementary, so I have had to rely greatly on lexicons and commentaries instead of dealing with the original texts. Thus it would be foolhardy to suggest that this research would give all the answers to the issue of the use of adornment; but it is my prayer that it will whet the desire of others, who could like me begin a journey, of examining what the Bible has to say with regard to this pertinent issue. This research would have achieved its objectives if this gives answers to other Pastors, who struggle whether 'to flow with the tide' of 'this is what we have been doing in our church' or to take a bold stand once they are convinced Biblically!

1. PROOF TEXTS AND EISEGESIS REGARDING ADORNMENT

An illustration somebody shared on the danger of using proof texts beautifully captures the thesis of this chapter. A Sunday school teacher once asked a group of kids whether it was wrong to pull the tail of a cat. She however added a clause that whatever the answer, the children would have to prove it from the Scriptures. Most of them were unanimous that it was wrong to pull the cat's tail but the problem was that they didn't know how to prove it from the Scriptures. All of a sudden, a young boy stood up and said that he had the answer. He said that it was wrong to pull the cat's tail and substantiated it by quoting a part of the verse, 'what God has joined together let no man put asunder!' Now we may laugh at the illustration but many of us who interpret the Holy Writ are guilty at some point of taking a text out of its context.

1.1 The need for correct exegesis

The interpretation of the Word of God is not as easy as it seems. This can be illustrated by Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts chapter 8. Philip meets a eunuch returning from Jerusalem. He hears him read from Isaiah and asks him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" Acts 8:30 (NKJV) The eunuch replies by asking Philip in Acts 8:31 (NKJV), "How can I, unless someone guides me?" That brings us to the aspect of the need to bridge several gaps if we are to understand the Scriptures. Roy Zuck points out six major gaps that we need to bridge if we are to understand and properly interpret the Word. These six gaps are the time gap, the space gap, the customs gap, the language gap, the writing gap and spiritual gap.²

² Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd edn. (Secunderabad: O.M.Books, 2004), 16.

1. Time gap (chronological) – There is an extensive time gap between the present reader and the initial reader.
2. Space gap (geographical) – There is great geographical distance between where most of us live and the places where the Biblical events took place.
3. Customs gap (cultural) – There are numerous customs that one need to recognize in the Bible, failing which we may interpret incorrectly.
4. Language gap (linguistic) – The Bible was written with the help of three different languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, with each of them having distinct nuances peculiar to them.
5. Writing gap (literary) – There are differences in styles and forms of writing between the Biblical times and the present day. Biblical writers used a lot of proverb, parables and metaphors that need to be understood in its context.
6. Spiritual gap (supernatural) – There is the supernatural element that one cannot understand without the help of the Holy Spirit.

Zuck concludes this section by saying, “Some Biblical verses remain a mystery to even the most skilled interpreters.”³ Even Peter while writing about Paul’s epistles mentions that there were certain issues that were difficult to comprehend in 2 Peter 3:15 & 16, (NKJV) “*As also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you. As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction.*” Even in those days there were people who were misinterpreting the Scriptures!

³ Ibid., 18.

1.2 Exegesis versus eisegesis

Fee and Stuart share something pivotal to Biblical Interpretation in their book 'How to Read the Bible for all its Worth'. They underline the importance of exegesis.

The first task of the interpreter is called exegesis. Exegesis is the careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning. This is basically a historical task. It is the attempt to hear the Word as the original recipients were to have heard it, to find out what was the original intent of the words of the Bible.⁴

Thus it is crucial to study the text and the context before trying to be an exegete. The opposite of exegesis is 'eisegesis'. 'Eisegesis' is when one comes to the text with a preconceived notion and tries to read into the passage what it is not really saying, but what they want it to say. This method of interpretation in theological circles is also called 'proof text interpretation'. In this method a dogmatic position is first taken and then verses are taken to fortify it. This could range from an issue like a believer has to wear only white, ministers are to remain celibates, the prohibition of the use of instruments in the New Testament worship, observing the Sabbath or any matter of praxis and church life.

1.3 Few instances of eisegesis on the issue of adornment

I have examined certain scriptures that those who take an anti jewelry stand use, which are clear instances of 'eisegesis'. Most of these are instances where select words are chosen in a verse to prove a doctrinal position. Other words in the same verse are not considered. These are some of the verses that are used, and are not exhaustive.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*, 2nd edn. (Secunderabad: O.M.Books, 2000), 19.

Exodus 21 & Deuteronomy 15

Larry Kilpatrick in his article “Jewelry: Can I wear it and be a Seventh-day Adventist?” looks at the passages in Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 15, and concludes that earrings are associated with slavery. He goes on to say, “But Christians are not to be in bondage or slavery to the world.”⁵ Now we need to consider what these texts were addressing. Was the purpose of these passages to give a diatribe on jewelry? I would assume that these passages were recording certain customary aspects with regard to slavery in the land of Israel. In no way is that custom normative or something that we can draw a parallel to the believer’s life in the New Testament. By drawing a parallel between wearing earrings and being in bondage or slavery to the world the author of the article clearly shows his preconceived bias against the use of jewelry.

2 Kings 9:30 (NKJV)

Now when Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window.

People who teach that one should not wear makeup would look at this verse and propose that Jezebel was an ungodly woman and that she painted her eyes. They would then surmise that any one who paints her eye or face (KJV has translated it as face) is ungodly and has a ‘Jezebel spirit’. However on examining the text it reveals that the word translated ‘face’ is the common word for eyes. In the article ‘Should Women use Cosmetics?’ the author states that about 589 times this word is translated ‘eye’ or ‘eyes’ in the Bible. He further states that

⁵ Larry Kilpatrick, ‘Jewelry: Can I wear it and be a Seven-day Adventist?’ Accessed on April 13, 2005; Available at <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/editorial/ed124-jewelry.php3>; internet.

painting of the eye was a common custom of those times.⁶ We also see the phrase “adorned her head” which is best translated as ‘attired her hair’. Some translations would render it as she combed her hair or put on a hat.⁷ If we state that painting of the eyes was sinful on the part of Jezebel, then so was combing her hair or putting on a hat! Obviously true Christian standards or doctrines cannot be based on incidental statements such as these!

Jeremiah 4:30 (NKJV)

And when you are plundered, What will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, Though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, Though you enlarge your eyes with paint, In vain you will make yourself fair; Your lovers will despise you; They will seek your life.

This verse could be used to state that it is a vain thing to beautify oneself (*‘in vain you will make yourself fair’*). Some would use this to say that we are not to use expensive clothes or coloured clothes. However it is important to study the background of the text. This verse speaks of Jerusalem’s unfaithfulness to God. The prophet uses the analogy of a woman unfaithful to her husband. This woman wore ornaments, painted her eyes and clothed herself with crimson. However the issue in question is Jerusalem’s lack of fidelity not the adornment used in the imagery.

However if wearing of crimson is sinful, what about the ‘virtuous woman’ in Proverbs 31:21 who clothes her household in scarlet (crimson)? What about David in 2 Samuel 1:24, singing a paean about Saul clothing the daughters of Zion in scarlet (crimson)? Would that be also

⁶ [n.a.], ‘Should women use Cosmetics?’ Accessed on February 14, 2005; Available at <http://members.cox.net/rev.claude/stdy35-3.htm>; internet.

⁷ Ibid.

sinful? As suggested earlier the use of ornaments, wearing of crimson, and painting of eyes was common and an unquestioned practice of that time.⁸ The point that is being emphasized in the imagery is the unfaithfulness of Jerusalem and not her adornment!

Ezekiel 23:40 (NKJV)

Furthermore you sent for men to come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and there they came. And you washed yourself for them, painted your eyes, and adorned yourself with ornaments.

This verse also like the verse in Jeremiah uses the same analogy of the unfaithful wife, representing apostate Jerusalem. This verse is also used by proponents of the anti jewelry stand to strengthen their claims. If decking oneself with ornaments and painting of the eyes is sinful, then logically taking a bath is also. The woman in the verse washes herself or takes a bath before she decks herself with ornaments and painted her eyes. It is crucial that we learn to look beyond the poetic imagery, and look at the heart of the issue, the apostasy and spiritual declension of Jerusalem rather than try to prove that bathing, wearing ornaments or painting the eyes is sinful!

Ezekiel 28:17 (NKJV)

"Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, That they might gaze at you.

Joe Crew in his article 'Culture and the Christian' looks at this verse and comments, "It is truly a staggering thought that the great original sin by the author of evil was the sin of pride

⁸ Ibid.

of appearance”⁹. Now we know from the book of Isaiah that great original sin of Lucifer was trying to be equal with God (*For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.* Isaiah 14:13,14 NKJV) and not pride because of beauty of appearance! Also it is crucial that we look at the aspect of Hebrew parallelism, and poetic hyperbole while interpreting Hebrew poetry. However it would not be prudent to infer that we are not to use jewelry because Lucifer fell because of pride of appearance.

Haggai 2:8 (NKJV)

'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine,' says the LORD of hosts.

Certain people who teach the nonuse of jewelry based on this verse would conclude that one should not use adornment, because the silver and gold belong to the Lord. They would propose that when one uses jewelry they are stealing what belongs to God. Using a similar line of reasoning we wouldn't be able to use any thing from the 'earth', because "*The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein*" Psalms 24:1 (NKJV). A close look at the context of this verse (in Haggai) would reveal that this verse has nothing to do with use or nonuse of adornment, but the rebuilding of the temple after the exile. The people were busy building their homes at the expense of rebuilding the temple. This is when the prophet reprimanded the people by reminding them of the ownership of God over all that they possessed!

⁹ Joe Crews, 'Culture and the Christian' Accessed on April 13, 2005; Available at <https://www.amazingfacts.org/items/ReadMedia.asp?ID=682>; internet.

Revelation 12 & Revelation 17-18

Consider another two passages that are used in Revelation, which Kilpatrick (a Seventh-day Adventist writer) uses to advocate nonuse of jewelry. He points out that in Revelation 12, there is mention of the woman in white who is a pure woman. Aside from a crown, she is unadorned, and the crown she wears is a 'stephanos' (a crown of victory). He postulates that this woman represents the pure church. In contrast to her is a harlot, found in Revelation 17 and 18. She is dressed in scarlet and purple, and quite fully adorned with jewelry. He proposes that she represents the apostate church that makes war on those whom Jesus died for.¹⁰ This is another classic case of 'eisegesis', for the moral of the story in neither Revelation nor Luke is the nonuse of purple or jewelry!

1.4 Conclusion

If wearing coloured clothes or jewelry is forbidden in the Bible, what about the multi-coloured coat that Jacob gave Joseph in Genesis 37:3, or the vesture of our Lord for which the people cast lots in Matthew 27:35 (it would have been worth something for people to cast lots for!). Can we pass judgment on whether they were sinful or holy based on the colour or cost of their attire? Using the same line of reasoning we could conclude that in the story of the 'Rich man and Lazarus' in Luke 16: 19-31, that the rich man went to a place of torment because he was dressed in purple and fine linen. Certain incidental facts should be left as part of the narrative rather than trying to impose a standard based on it. A verse should never be isolated from the context. We need to be consistent in our hermeneutics.

¹⁰ Larry Kilpatrick, 'Jewelry: Can I wear it and be a Seven-day Adventist?' Accessed on April 13, 2005; Available at <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/editorial/ed124-jewelry.php3>; internet.

2. ADORNMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In developing a position on adornment people often look at certain passages without looking at its historic and sociological context. However the intent of this chapter is to examine these passages in its socio-historic context and to interpret it. Though key passages in the Old Testament which deal with adornment will be considered in this chapter, it will not cover all such passages.

2.1 Genesis 24 : 22, 53 (NKJV)

Verse 22 – *So it was, when the camels had finished drinking, that the man took a golden nose ring weighing half a shekel, and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels of gold,*

Verse 53 – *Then the servant brought out jewelry of silver, jewelry of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother.*

Matthews points out that in the Patriarchal period jewelry was common adornment for both men and women. We see Eliezer, Abraham's servant giving Rebekah a nose ring and arm bracelets in verse 22, as well as unspecified ornaments of gold and silver as bridal presents in verse 53.¹¹ Now looking at this transaction we can safely infer that this gift of jewelry had the sanction of Abraham. Sarah, Abraham's wife (who is looked as a 'holy woman' in 1 Peter 3:5, 6) would have definitely been using jewelry, or else Abraham would have opposed the use of it for his prospective daughter in law. It is important to realize that the worth of this gold jewelry given in dowry was not ordinary. Betrothal was customarily effected in the ancient Near East by large capital transfers from the bridegroom's family to the brides

¹¹ Victor H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, rev.edn. (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 5.

family. Deut 22:29 places a limit of fifty shekels on such bride money (Hebrew - mohar) which would be equivalent to several years' wages for an ordinary paid laborer (cf. Gen. 29:18-20).

In the article, 'Jewelry Talks: A Novel Thesis', the author comments on the earrings and bracelets given to Rebecca in verse 22.

That's a lot of shekels to lay on her. The jewelers in the Bible immediately translate the worth of the ornaments into gold, into money. Of course the earrings and bracelets are more than that; their great value is symbolic of the high holy destiny that has fallen upon Rebecca. She will be the mother of a race.¹²

Wenham suggests that the "beautiful presents" given to Laban and his mother probably were equivalent to the bride money. Usually this bride money was later on passed on to the bride when she was married as part of her dowry. However Abraham's servant gave Rebekah herself "silver and gold and ornaments", items that frequently figure in dowry lists. Whether this was a mark of sheer goodwill or he feared that Rebekah's grasping brother would not give her an adequate dowry is not said.¹³ Thus we can see that the patriarchs were not opposed to the use of adornment.

2.2 Genesis 35: 4 (NKJV)

So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem.

¹² [n.a], 'Jewelry Talks: A Novel Thesis' Accessed on April 13, 2005; Available at <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0679758496/104-1003702-6017562/v=glance&vi=excerpt;internet>.

¹³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Dallas: Word Books Publishers, 1994)149-150.

Jacob is asked by God to return to Bethel to build an altar unto God. He asks his family to remove their foreign gods. The family members respond as requested by putting away their foreign gods, and also their earrings. Many ask why were those earrings removed. Vernon Mc Gee points out that earrings were associated with worship in that day. The earrings identified them as idolaters, and so they got rid of them.¹⁴ Spence and Exell suggest that amulets and charms indicated superstition, false worship and wrong ideas.¹⁵ Manuel quotes Westermann, who considers the earrings to be amulets.¹⁶ Wenham looks at this passage and observes,

On two later occasions, earrings were used to make objects of idolatrous worship, the golden calf and an ephod (Exodus 32: 2-4, Judges 8:24-27). It could be that burying the earring also with the foreign gods expressed their complete determination to dispose of the idols and also any material that could be used to replace them.¹⁷

Thus we can conclude that these ornaments carried some religious significance and could have had iconic impressions on them. Hayden points out that often these earrings became connected with idolatry because heathen nations engraved strange deities and figures on their jewelry. These earrings were used as charms with a superstitious purpose.¹⁸ That is the reason Jacob asked it to be removed before going to worship God. However it wouldn't be right to conclude that earrings were unacceptable to God based on this passage.

¹⁴ J. Vernon McGee, *Through the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, Vol.1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1981), 143.

¹⁵ H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (eds.), *The Pulpit Commentary : Genesis* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co. [n.d.]), 415.

¹⁶ Angel Manuel Rodrigues, *Jewelry in the Bible* (Maryland: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1999), 39.

¹⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 2, 324.

2.3 Exodus 3:22 & 12:35,36 (NKJV)

3: 22 - *But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.*

12:35,36 - *Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.*

Guthrie and Motyer observe that the Egyptians having felt the power of God's hand were glad to be rid of their slaves to such an extent, that they were ready to part with their riches in mere response to a request.¹⁹ This 'spoiling' was God's way of returning what was rightfully theirs, for years of unpaid bonded labour. The contributions of the Egyptian women must have been immense in quantity and value!

Matthew Henry reiterates this when he comments, "The Israelites might receive and keep what they thus borrowed, or rather required, of the Egyptians, as justly as servants receive wages from their masters for work done, and sue for it if detained."²⁰ If jewels of gold and jewels of silver were intrinsically evil, God wouldn't have given it to them. They were to be put not only on themselves, but also on their sons and daughters. Spence and Exell postulates that festal array always involved wearing of jewelry. In Old Testament times only mourners

¹⁸ [n.a], *The Victor Handbook of Bible Knowledge* ([n.p]: [n.pub.], [n.d]),69, cited in Keavin Hayden, 'Principles of Adornment' Accessed on February 20,2005; Available at <http://www.adventistreview.org/2001-1538/story2-1.html>; internet.

¹⁹ D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer (eds.), *New Bible Commentary*, 3rd edn. (Bombay: Pillar Projects, 1990), 124.

²⁰ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 199), 84.

would abstain from anointing their head or wearing jewelry (Exodus 33:4). The Pulpit Commentary sums it beautifully,

Now then, why this spoiling? That Israel might march, not like a horde of dirty, ragged slaves, but in festal array. Compared with the slavery of Egypt the future might have been one long holiday, one holy day unto the Lord.²¹

Thus wearing of jewelry in this passage is representative of their joyous celebration unto the Lord who was delivering them from slavery.

2.4 Exodus 33: 4-6 (NKJV)

And when the people heard this bad news, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments.

For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the children of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you. Now therefore, take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you.'" So the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by Mount Horeb.

Many suggest by looking at this passage that God asked Israel to remove the ornaments and that henceforth the Israelites never wore it. Well that does not seem to be the case as in Exodus 35:4-29, we see that the Israelites gave of their jewelry for the construction of the tabernacle. The Pulpit Commentary suggests that the intention to remove the ornaments was a test of their penitence.²² Matthew Henry comments on the phrase, 'put off thy ornaments' by saying "put thyself in the posture of a penitent."²³ The NIV Bible Commentary observes, "Akin to putting on sackcloth and ashes, the people stripped off their ornaments, as a sign of

²¹ H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (eds.), *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Wilcox and Follett Co. [n.d.]), 294.

²² H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (eds.), *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: Wilcox and Follett Co. [n.d.]), 348.

mourning for their sin (cf. Gen. 35:4; Ezekiel 26:16).²⁴ The removal of jewelry was a sign of mourning for idolatry; they were in no way repenting of wearing jewelry!

2.5 Isaiah 3: 18 – 23 (NKJV)

In that day the Lord will take away the finery: The jingling anklets, the scarves, and the crescents; The pendants, the bracelets, and the veils; The headdresses, the leg ornaments, and the headbands; The perfume boxes, the charms, and the rings; The nose jewels, the festal apparel, and the mantles; The outer garments, the purses, and the mirrors; The fine linen, the turbans, and the robes.

This list begins with jewelry, includes fine clothes but also represents everything that human pride can hang on to. The prophet enumerates twenty-one prized pieces of adornment used by the women of those days, from anklets to head tiaras, from perfume boxes to mirrors, from various garments to the ornaments with which they were bedecked. Hailey points out that neither the prophet nor Peter (1 Peter 3:1-5) condemns women for adorning themselves. What he does condemn is that which he sees beneath all the vanity and external show, the character, which clothing and ornamentation cannot hide.²⁵ Bultema looks at this twenty-one items and comments, “It is as though with the enumeration of three groups of seven he wishes to express the fullness of unrighteousness.²⁶ Beneath the glitter and the worldly ostentation God looks at the selfish, proud and sensuous lives of the daughters of Zion. More

²³ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 109.

²⁴ Kenneth L. Barker and John Kohlenberger III (eds.), *NIV Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 121.

²⁵ Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on Isaiah* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), 57.

²⁶ Harry Bultema, *Commentary on Isaiah* (Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1981), 71.

than the adornment it was the character of these women that was contrary to the holiness of Jehovah.

Watts points out that by this time Jerusalem was well aware of fashions in the world's capitals and was able to avail itself of its expensive luxuries.²⁷ Hayden points out that the women of those days frequented the shops of Phoenician artisans to buy their ornaments and clothes. He further states that the jewelry represents the apostasy of Zion's daughters.²⁸ Watts reiterates this when he proposes that many items listed originated in cult and in magic rituals.²⁹ What is being condemned is their sensuous lives and proud haughtiness. If we reject ornaments based on this passage, we also need to reject changes of apparel, veils, hoods, mirrors and fine linen.

2.6 Isaiah 61:10 (NKJV)

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

A similar thought is expressed in Jeremiah 2:32 (NKJV), *Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?* Both Isaiah and Jeremiah talk of a bride or maid decking with ornaments. Isaiah even contrasts adornment to righteousness and salvation. If adornment were sinful would he compare it to the salvation and righteousness of God? In Jeremiah God compares forgetting Him to a maid forgetting her jewelry. If jewelry were sinful would God

²⁷ John D.W. Watts (ed.), *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 24 (Dallas, Word Publishers, 1985), 46.

²⁸ Keavin Hayden, 'A People Adorned' Accessed on February 20,2005; Available at <http://www.adventistreview.org/2001-1538/story2.html>; internet.

²⁹ John D.W. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 24, 46.

have made such a comparison? The above verses in Isaiah and Jeremiah are often interpreted in a spiritual sense. If so why don't we consider the passage in Isaiah 3 similarly?

2.7 Ezekiel 16:11-14 (NKJV)

"I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck." And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. "Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. "Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through my splendor which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord GOD.

The imagery used is of a forsaken girl child. Israel is compared to this forsaken girl child. Here we see God symbolically decking his bride. Does this passage suggest that God arbitrarily rejects jewelry? The contrary is seen in verse 13 where God looks at her and calls her "exceedingly beautiful". God says that he blessed his bride with bracelets, necklaces, earrings, jewels and crowns. If jewelry were sinful God wouldn't have blessed them with such things. Allen points out that her royal rank is indicated by the multicolored robe, worn by the royal bride in Psalms 45:15. A complete set of jewelry is lavished upon her culminating in a royal diadem.³⁰ This passage like many others does not represent God as opposed to adornment.

³⁰ Leslie C. Allen (ed.), *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 28 (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1994), 238.

2.8 Conclusion

We can make certain conclusions from the Old Testament passages we dealt with. There was never a prohibition of the use of jewelry in the Old Testament. God is seen as the source of wealth and fine jewels, whether it is in Exodus where God blesses Israel with literal jewels; or in Ezekiel where figurative language is used. This observation may upset the applecart of the traditional thinking of those who oppose adornment, but we must allow the weight of Biblical evidence to determine our conclusions.

However, there are instances in the Old Testament where jewels are used for pride, self-glorification or superstitious purposes. This can be seen in the passages in Isaiah 3 and Genesis 35. It is such type of use that God always condemns. From these passages in the Old Testament we can safely conclude that there is nothing intrinsically wrong in jewelry, and jewelry like any other gift from God can be abused or misused.

3. ADORNMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament has two key passages that deal with adornment (1 Timothy 2:8, 9 and 1 Peter 3: 1-6). I hope to look at both the texts and examine them in the Greek. The proponents of the anti jewelry stand use both these texts to draw their conclusion that jewelry is forbidden for the New Testament believer. However let us do an exegetical study of these texts before coming to a conclusion.

There are however two other passages in the New Testament that mention the usage of rings. In Luke 15:22 we see that the father gives the prodigal son a ring, symbolic of his authority as a son. Jason Young commenting on this says, “Surely, Jesus would not have used a sinful practice as part of His parable.”³¹ The other passage is in the book of James where a person with a gold ring was given a preferential treatment in a Christian assembly (James 2:2). What James condemns in that passage is not the fact that he wore a ring, but the preferential treatment meted out to him because of it. Which raises the question whether there is anything intrinsically wrong (except when used with a superstitious purpose) in wearing a ring?

Let us however examine the other two passages that are used to forbid the use of jewelry. As most people who take an anti-jewelry stand emphasize on these texts, I have looked at various commentaries and lexicons to see how it is rendered in the Greek.

³¹ Jason Young, ‘Jewelry: Does the Bible say it’s a Sin?’ Accessed on April 13, 2005; Available at <http://www.actseighteen.com/articles/jewelry-bible.htm>; internet.

3.1 1 Timothy 2:9,10 (NKJV)

In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

Homer Kent points out that the construction “in like manner” - ‘*Hosautos*’ links this paragraph to the preceding discussion, showing that the context of the passage is the public worship service.³² Calvin looks at the same word ‘*Hosautos*’, and comments that women are to pray this way.³³ This would then imply that the exhortation to the women regarding dress and adornment is their attire when they attend a public worship gathering. Angel Rodriguez points out that though Paul had primarily the worship service in mind, his instructions were for Christian life in general.³⁴

Kent then looks at the word “adorn” in the Greek - ‘*Kosmioi*’. He points out that this adjective is a cognate of the verb ‘*Kosmeo*’ which is also used in this sentence and is translated “to adorn” or “to arrange”. Hence the apparel is to be “well arranged”.³⁵ In modern day language we would say her apparel should be in good taste. Modesty should be the bottom line in the attire of a Godly woman. Zodiates looks at the word and gives the following meanings – to adorn, garnish, decorate the sepulchers with garlands or flowers, or

³² Homer A. Kent Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles: Studies in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, rev. edn. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 105.

³³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*. trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 65, cited in Homer A. Kent Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles: Studies in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, rev. edn. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 105.

³⁴ Angel Manuel Rodrigues, *Jewelry in the Bible* (Maryland: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1999), 63.

³⁵ Homer A. Kent Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles*, 105.

by adding columns or other ornaments (Matthew 23:29). To trim as a lamp is another usage of the same word (Matthew 25:7). Metaphorically the word could imply to honour or dignify. Thus he concludes that this may refer to the internal adorning of the soul, though the external adorning is also implied.³⁶

The next phrase we need to look at is “modest apparel” – ‘*Katastole Kosmio*’. Zodhiates suggests that “apparel” – ‘*Katastole*’ can be translated as a long garment or robe reaching down to the feet, a robe of dignity.³⁷ The word “modest” – ‘*Kosmio*’ can be translated as orderly or decent. The virtue of the ‘*Kosmios*’, is not only the propriety of ones dress and demeanour, but of ones inner life which expresses itself outwardly.³⁸ Kent reiterates the same thought when he observes that the manner in which a women dresses indicates a great deal about what sort of woman she is.³⁹ The focus thus shifts from the external act of dressing to the internal condition of the heart as ones attire is the expression of tastes, interest and even character.

The word “propriety” - ‘*Aidos*’ denotes reverence, respect and modesty.⁴⁰ Zodhiates looks at this word and defines it as, ‘an innate moral repugnance to a dishonourable act or fashion.’⁴¹ This coupled with “moderation” - ‘*sophrosune*’, or a well-balanced state of mind, will protect the women from vanity and worldly display. Zodhiates defines it as, ‘of sound mind, sane,

³⁶ Spiros Zodhiates (ed.), *The Complete Word Study Dictionary* (Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 1993), 880.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 844.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 880.

³⁹ Homer A. Kent Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles*, 105.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 91.

temperate'. The meaning would also include sober-mindedness, moderation of desires, passions or conduct.⁴²

Now we can look at few words that Paul classifies as incompatible to the Godly woman – “braided hair” ‘*Plegma*’ which can be defined as anything plaited, braided or woven,⁴³ “gold”, ‘*Chrusos*’ a type of precious metal,⁴⁴ the use of “pearls” ‘*Margarites*’⁴⁵ and “costly clothing” ‘*Himatismo Polutelei*’ oppressively expensive, rare and luxurious⁴⁶. Knight points out that “or” ‘*Kai*’ may be used to connect braids with gold because hair settings and jewelry are often taken together and because the gold in mind here is jewelry intertwined with the braid or a gold net over the hair⁴⁷. If ‘*Kai*’ is used to connect braids and gold then the gold mentioned in the verse, need not be gold jewelry but gold as adornment on the hair. Rodriguez observes that pearls were used for the adornment of the body or the garments among the wealthy members of the society. He further elucidates on costly array by saying that the emphasis is not on the costliness of the garment “but on a luxurious, ostentatious type of garment that does not reflect the nature of true beauty as understood by the Christian community”⁴⁸.

Knight who looks at the social ethos of the context that this text was addressing makes a pertinent observation, “The reason for Paul’s prohibition of elaborate hair styles, ornate

⁴² Ibid., 1363.

⁴³ Ibid., 1167.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1488.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 943.

⁴⁶ Angel Manuel Rodrigues, *Jewelry in the Bible*, 68.

⁴⁷ George W. Knight III (ed.), *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Pastoral Epistles* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 135.

⁴⁸ Angel Manuel Rodrigues, *Jewelry in the Bible*, 68.

jewelry, and extremely expensive clothing becomes clear when one reads in contemporary literature of the inordinate time, expense and effort that elaborately braided hair and jewels demanded, not just ostentatious display, but also the mode of dress of courtesans and harlots.”⁴⁹

Lea and Griffin in the New American Commentary suggests that to dress ‘modestly’ demands that the women dress tastefully and not provocatively. They further comment on this passage by saying, “The prohibition against braided hair or expensive jewelry or clothing prohibits a gaudy, showy display, not normal attention to neatness and good taste.”⁵⁰ In other words what is being forbidden is an excessive, ostentatious display that attracts attention to ones self and not the act of dressing or adornment. The focus of the passage is on good works and a Godly life style. Matthew Henry points out that ‘good works are the best ornament’.⁵¹ Thus to infer that one should not braid the hair, use gold, pearls or costly garments at all would be trying to impose the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law where the emphasis is a Godly lifestyle.

3.2 1 Peter 3: 3,4 (NKJV)

Do not let your adornment be merely outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel; rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

⁴⁹ George W. Knight III, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 135.

⁵⁰ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr. (eds.), *The New American Commentary*, Vol.34 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 96.

⁵¹ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1889.

Kistemaker while looking at this passage suggests that we ought to read verses 3 and 4 as a unit and see the comparison Peter is making. The contrast is between the outward beauty of a woman and her inner grace. What Peter is teaching is that the latter is much more important than the former.⁵² Hiebert points out the use of the word “rather” *‘alla’*, a strong adversative conjunction, which indicates the true adornment that Christian wives should rely on to win their husbands. The true adornment is “the hidden person of the heart” *‘ho kruptes tes kardias anthropos’*. This marks a contrast to the external, visible conspicuous ornaments just repudiated.⁵³

Thus it is pivotal in understanding this passage that the Petrine emphasis is on the inner virtue rather than the external act of adorning. Eerdman reiterates this truth when he says that this is no prohibition of jewelry or becoming costumes but rather a comparison between two forms of attractiveness. He comments, “The apparel which bears best and is never out of style is the meek and quiet spirit which never worries or causes worry; it is pleasing not only to men but also to God.”⁵⁴

Hiebert in his commentary on 1 Peter proposes that the noun “adornment” *‘Kosmos’*, from which we derive ‘cosmetics’, is used in its original sense of an orderly arrangement, (elsewhere in the New Testament the term signifies ‘the world’ as an orderly system) hence adornment or decoration. The reference is to that innate desire, especially among women, to resort to orderly external arrangement, to make one’s appearance beautiful and attractive.

⁵² Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1996), 120.

⁵³ D Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 200.

⁵⁴ Charles R. Eerdman, *The General Epistles: An exposition* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1986), 89.

Peter, while addressing the issue sanctioned that desire.⁵⁵ Peter does not forbid the desire of a woman to look good but rather draws attention to the need to adorn ones self with inner virtues.

“Arranging the hair” *‘emplokes’*, used only here in the New Testament, denotes action, not the use of braids, but the elaborate process of braiding that involves the services of a professional hairdresser.⁵⁶ Matthew Henry commenting on the time when this epistle was written points out that it was lewd women who commonly used this plaiting of hair.⁵⁷ Braided hair does not thus denote a convenient way of handling the hair, but designates a highly elaborate and cultivated art of feminine adornment. In Peter’s day, the hairstyles of fashionable Roman ladies consumed much time and attention and were highly artificial and ostentatious.

“And” *‘kai’* continues the portrayal, ‘the wearing of gold jewelry’ where the towering hairdo was secured with costly combs and hair nets of gold. But the term is broader, “wearing” *‘peritheseos’*, literally putting around. It includes the common practice of placing various golden objects around the neck, ankles, arms, and fingers, and suspending glittering ornaments from the ears.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ D Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 199.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1889.

⁵⁸ D Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 199.

The third item which the NIV renders “and fine apparel” ‘*e enduseos himation*’, is introduced with “or” ‘*e*’ rather than “and” ‘*kai*’ and implies an alternative method of extravagant display or of putting on garments. The NIV supplies the intended meaning by adding the word “fine”, which is not in the original.⁵⁹ Putting on ‘*enduseos*’, a term not used elsewhere in the New Testament, is another noun of action and apparently indicates the practice of appearing in great variety of dresses which Wand refers to as “the frequent changing of frocks”.⁶⁰

Dauids observes that the critique would apply mainly to the upper-class who could afford more than the simplest dress. Peasant women and female slaves normally had no choice of dress. They were happy if they possessed one set of clothing in good condition.⁶¹ He opines that simplicity in attire would make dress uniform and lessen class distinction within the church. He further points out that it would be wrong to legislate feminine dress in the church as the church fathers did, though the emphasis on simplicity cannot be overlooked.⁶²

Hillyer proposes that the apostle is not forbidding Christian women from having hairdos or from wearing ornaments. He suggests that Peter’s language is to be taken as more figurative than literal since grammatically he means “gold-braided hair”, after the fashionable and extravagant hairstyling of the day among the wealthy, and which amounted to virtually submerging the hair in lavish gold spangles. Surface show aside, elaborate hairdo consumed

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ J.W.C. Wand, *The General Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude: Westminster Commentaries* (London : Methuen, 1934), 90, cited in D Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 200.

⁶¹ Peter H. Davids, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle of Peter* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 117.

⁶² Ibid., 118.

much time, and Christians had more important matters of the Spirit to which to devote themselves (1 Peter 1:18).⁶³

Hiebert commenting on this passage sums it beautifully when he says, “It goes without saying that the design of the passage is not to encourage slovenliness or sordid indifference towards female attire. Nor does it constitute an absolute prohibition of braids or the use of any items of jewelry any more than it forbids the actual putting on of clothes. It is a warning against extravagance and self display.”⁶⁴

3.3 Conclusion

Jason Young points out that it is important not to take one or two passages in isolation and make a doctrine out of them, without first considering the entire weight of scriptural teaching. Doing so inevitably lead to errant teachings and inaccurate assumptions of God’s Word.⁶⁵ The New Testament is clear that it is not jewelry that is the issue but the motive with which it is used. Lord Jesus while preaching the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ emphasized that sin had to do with the condition of the heart and not merely external acts. We need to keep that in mind while trying to come out with any standard on holiness or sanctification.

⁶³ Norman Hillyer, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 93.

⁶⁴ D Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 200.

⁶⁵ Jason Young, ‘Jewelry: Does the Bible say it’s a Sin?’ Accessed on April 13, 2005; Available at <http://www.actseighteen.com/articles/jewelry-bible.htm>; internet.

4. GUIDELINES FOR ADORNMENT

Having looked at the issue of adornment in both Old and New Testaments let us examine some of the guidelines that can be derived from scriptures regarding adornment. While we have established from both Old and New Testament that adornment is not forbidden for the believer, we need to realize that there are certain boundaries which have been specified in the scriptures. Certain types of adornment is expressly forbidden –

1. Superstitious and religious use of adornment – There are certain instances when people use rings and amulets with the belief that it can ward off or prevent evil from happening in their lives. The instance in Genesis 35: 4 of removing the earrings is a clear instance of such use (already discussed in chapter 2). Such use is clearly forbidden in the scriptures.
2. Extravagant use and with the motive to attract attention – The scriptures also admonish those who use adornment to be modest in their use. The inward motive is of paramount importance in God's sight. If someone adorns themselves in order to attract attention to them they are not in line with the scriptural teaching. The important phrase used in the book of Timothy is 'moderation'. While the use of jewelry is not forbidden the extravagant, ostentatious use of the same is unacceptable.
3. Use of adornment to flaunt wealth – There are instances where people adorn themselves to display their wealth. The book of James records an instance where a person wearing a gold ring was given preferential treatment in a Christian assembly

(James 2: 1-3). Again it would come down to the motive behind the use and not the mere use or nonuse of adornment.

While looking at guidelines let us also realize the context in which we are called to minister. As in many Eastern cultures, in India the total abstinence from adornment represents mourning or widowhood. This can be seen even in Biblical times when the people of Israel removed their adornment to symbolize penitence (Exodus 33: 4-6). Also in Hindu understanding people who renounce the world and its pleasures also abstain from adorning themselves. Now while we believe in renouncing worldly affections (Colossians 3:2 - Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth) we do not advocate ascetic renunciation. However it is important that we underline the fact that one should not be attached to any worldly thing. We may possess and use jewelry as adornment but at no point should we let it possess us. A love for adornment that supercedes love for God is unacceptable to God.

There are however certain cultural aspects in every culture that are not intrinsically bad or in opposition to God's revealed Word. Hence adornment in order to represent married status would not be contrary to God's Word. Similarly adornment to make one presentable in public or for a specific occasion and used in moderation is acceptable in the light of God's Word. Let us promote honourable appearance in the sight of God and men.

CONCLUSION

The Pharisees can be looked at as the strictest sect in Judaism who considered themselves as guardians of the law. They were very stringent on tithing, fasting, rules and stipulations. They were known for strict adherence of ceremonial cleansing, of observance of days, external fanfare like long prayers and long robes. Yet in their zest to be blameless on keeping the law, they ignored the “weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.” (Matthew 23:23). They would bind “heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders” (Matthew 23:4). In their earnestness to proselytize “travel land and sea to win one proselyte.” Jesus spoke about them as blind guides, people who would “strain out a gnat and swallow a camel” (Matthew 23:24). Just as there is the danger of lasciviousness, there is equally the danger of Pharisaical legalism.

In Acts 15 the apostles at the council at Jerusalem decide that they wouldn't want to ‘trouble’ the Gentile converts with rules except that they abstain from pollutions of idols, from fornication, from things strangled and from blood (Acts 15:19,20). Peter asks the apostles not to test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither their fathers nor they were able to bear? He reiterates the fact that salvation is through grace and not through legalistic adherence to the law! (Acts 15:10,11) Anything that goes beyond that, as a prerequisite for salvation, is an attempt to add to the finished work of Christ, and is a ‘works program’. Thus those who insist that removing of jewelry is the only way of representing a saved and sanctified life are adding to the revealed Word of God.

It is human nature to look more to external actions rather than internal motivation when it comes to sin. This human reasoning suggests that what we do is what counts and that our motives and intent are secondary. This is when one begins to stress the letter of the law and misses the spirit of the law. Young states it beautifully, “Certainly our actions count, but considering actions while ignoring or minimizing the true motivations behind them is a mistake. Sin is first conceived in the heart and every sinful action is backed by sinful intent.”⁶⁶

Fallen mankind can abuse jewelry like every other good thing from God. The problem lies not in the use or nonuse of jewelry but the motivation with which it is used. If the use of adornment is to appear sensuous and to attract attention to ones’ self it is wrong, however if used only to adorn ones’ self and look presentable, it does not violate any scriptural principle. The overall Biblical principle regarding the use of jewelry and cosmetics is that we practice modesty and simplicity, rather than trying to draw attention to ourselves. Our character, instead of our appearance should be what we are known for and remembered. It is showy display, vanity and pride that are unacceptable to God and not the wearing of gold or jewelry. For man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart.

⁶⁶ Jason Young, ‘Holiness Standards and Sin’ Accessed on April 13, 2005; Available at <http://www.actseighteen.com/articles/standards.htm>; internet.

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