

Image Integrity

Principle-Based Concepts—Straight Talk about a Sticky Subject

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“God Created Man in His Own Image”

Image is often thought to be a negative word regarding our appearance, likeness, or look. It is exactly the right word to use, as it is the very word God used referring to our own creation. *“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them”* (Genesis 1:26-27).

We, as men and women, are God’s masterworks. Last among the creations he created man and woman—not only the most complex of creatures, but created in His own image—an intimately personal aspect of himself. Indeed, we are his children, his offspring, children of the same living God, alive only because of him. *“For in him we live, and move, and have our being; . . . For we are also his offspring”* (Acts 17:28).

What a marvelous place we have in the scheme of things—in God’s Plan of Salvation! For as we are the offspring of God, we are beloved spirit children of Heavenly parents, physical creations, sons and daughters with eternal potential to become like our Heavenly parents. As God is Holy, we can be Holy (Lev. 11:44). We are divine in nature and destiny. If we are ever in doubt about ourselves, this knowledge of our image identity can strengthen us, enabling us to move forward in our lives.

“All Things unto Me Are Spiritual”

People often make the mistake of assuming appearance or image doesn’t matter. Image does matter. It was God who first clothed us (*See Genesis 3:21*), making clothing or dress an integral part of our appearance or image. Image is a matter of spiritual consequence to every individual—to every child of God. *“Wherefore verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; . . . neither carnal nor sensual”* (Doctrine & Covenants 29:34-35). Image is a moral matter with both earthly and eternal consequences. While what you wear won’t get you into heaven, it may keep you out!

The basic elements of our appearance or image include dress, grooming, body language and etiquette. Together, they create our appearance or image. The way we dress, care for and carry ourselves, our manner and manners, our self presentation, personal style, poise, and presence—are part of who we are. What’s more, our image is us in the eyes and mind of self and others—a mental picture or visual impression and the way we are perceived.

“Do not underestimate the important symbolic and actual effect of appearance. Persons who are well groomed and modestly dressed invite the companionship of the Spirit of our Father in Heaven and are able to exercise a wholesome influence upon those around them. Persons who are unkempt and careless about their appearance, or adopt the visual symbols of those who often oppose our ideals, expose themselves and persons around them to influences that are degrading and dissonant. Outward appearance is often a reflection of inward tendencies” (President Harold B. Lee, “Be Loyal to the Royal Within You,” BYU, 11 September, 1973).

Image is a visible and key factor in daily life—an essential part of the human experience. In effect, it sets the boundaries for personal interaction or involvement—in the home, the school, church, and community, as well as in the workplace. Our image is always at work. It can work for us or against us, and often without our awareness.

A conscious awareness and understanding of image impact, or the effects of image, facilitates communication and interaction with others—as it moves us to reflect upon and better understand ourselves in everyday life. Speaking more simply, our image—the way we appear—directly affects:

- the way we think,
- the way we feel,
- the way we act or behave, and then
- the way others react or respond to us.

These points are the universal effects of image, the power of image, or image impact. Together, they establish the importance of moderate thought and attention to image or appearance—as well as a moderate investment of time, effort, and income. While the world’s focus is on first impressions on others, the first impression is actually on ourselves. Think in terms of dressing for excellence and dress to influence for good. Become more aware of the effects of image on self, on others, and on the achievement of our worthy goals.

“Look and Act like Members of His Church”

We cannot NOT communicate! Long before we are close enough to speak to someone, we announce ourselves. The language of dress, grooming, and the body is obvious to all and incredibly powerful. Our image reflects to self and to others, making statements about our thoughts, feelings, personality, values, attitudes, interests, intent, roles, and goals. It is true that “. . . man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7), however, it’s what’s inside that determines how we choose to dress and groom the outside. Image from the inside out reflects our heart and mind to self and others.

Consider the following statement from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland addressing a CES Fireside for Young Adults, September 12, 2004, at Brigham Young University, entitled Terror, Triumph, and a Wedding Feast: *“I do know this: When Christ comes, the members of His Church must look and act like members of His Church are supposed to look and act if we are to be acceptable to Him. . . . He must recognize us quickly and easily as truly being His disciples. As President J. Reuben Clark Jr. once advised, our faith must not be difficult to detect. Yes, if in that great, final hour we say we are believers, then we had surely better be demonstrating it. The Shepherd knows His sheep, and we must be known in that great day as His followers in deed as well as in word.”*

The symbols, cues, or clues in dress and grooming that communicate loud and clear are made up of the lines, shapes, colors, textures, and patterns used in the design of the clothing or grooming practice. The message depends on how these elements of design are used together. Because attention goes to contrast in line and shape, color, texture, or pattern, it’s not only what we choose to wear, but how we choose to wear it! We can use our choices to demonstrate or reflect whose side we are on, the Lord’s side or the worldly side—reflecting through our outward appearance or image that we are children of God, exemplary followers of Christ. When Christ comes for the second time, we must appear in a manner easily and quickly recognized as a disciple of God.

“Every Man Accountable, As a Steward”

We all recognize the value of managing our resources—time management, money management, meal management, business management, home and family management. However, clothing management is a sensitive, personal, emotional, and controversial topic, to which few people give positive thought or planning. For a faithful and wise steward, there is equally important value in clothing, wardrobe, and image management.

“Every man shall be . . . a steward over his own property” (Doctrine & Covenants 42:32). “. . . A commandment I give unto you, that ye shall organize yourselves . . . For it is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures” (Doctrine & Covenants 104:11-13). “. . . be diligent in preserving what thou hast, that thou mayest be a wise steward” (Doctrine & Covenants 136: 27).

We all practice some form or degree of image management every day. We dress for the weather, the work, or the occasion, to fit in or stand out, to save time or money or both. It simply needs to become a more conscious effort. Image management is the ongoing process of evaluating and controlling the impact of our appearance on self and others. In the positive sense, image management is affordably creating an authentic, appropriate, and attractive image which increases our confidence, capability, credibility, and productivity. It aids in the achievement of our goals, contributes to our continuing success, and simplifies our lives. It is part of our earthly stewardship and contributes to provident living. Image management is a necessary life skill. In the positive sense, image management is all about respect—respect for self and respect for others, respect for occasions, roles, and goals.

“The Glory of God Is Intelligence.”

“The glory of God is intelligence, or in other words, light and truth. Light and truth forsake that evil one” (Doctrine & Covenants 93:36-37). “Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come” (Doctrine & Covenants 130:18-19).

We are smart to develop image intelligence in this life—to gain light and knowledge in truth about dress and grooming, and to choose among the many options available to us according to our values, needs, roles, and goals. We need to learn to choose between what’s right and what’s merely easy. Furthermore, image intelligence is knowing what is authentic for us and appropriate for our situation or occasions, rather than what is simply right or wrong, easy, trendy, cool, edgy, or sexy. This is a finer discrimination in the pursuit of excellence and refinement. It implies striving for the highest standards in every phase of life, including image and self-presentation. When does image matter? Image matters whenever we make a choice about how we look—whenever our appearance affects the fulfillment of our roles and the achievement of our goals—both earthly and eternal.

“In the World”

Stained or faded, torn, ripped, frayed,
too big and baggy or too small and tight.

Because it is all they HAVE to wear—

Humble attitude, modest,
kind, considerate, and polite,
careful with what they have.

“Of the World”

Stained or faded, torn, ripped, frayed,
too big and baggy or too small and tight.

Because it is all they CHOOSE to wear—

Arrogant attitude, immodest,
defiant, rebellious, rude, prideful,
careless with what they have.

So much the same, and yet so very different.

In 1 Corinthians 15:49-50, Paul tells us that we must change our earthly image for a heavenly image if we want to dwell there. It is only when we are free of pride and arrogance that the mighty change in our countenances occurs. These concepts are often lacking today. Within Isaiah 41:29, 44:17, and 44: 9-10 we learn, that as God’s children distance themselves from Him, they become confused as to what image they originate from. They forget who they are. It appears our society is experiencing exactly that at this time in history.

Ezekiel 16:17 warns us that man often does not keep God as the ideal, but replaces Him with idols. In these latter days, too many of God’s children allow celebrities and fashion trends to become the idols of most importance. We become more concerned about pleasing one another than in pleasing God. Take for example, students choosing to go to school in sloppy, scanty, or tight-fitting attire because that’s what everybody wears. Consider the young man choosing to come to church wearing a wrinkled white shirt, low-riding baggy pants, and shoes without socks with the shoelaces dangling—‘cause it’s cool or comfortable. Picture the woman choosing to wear a brown-stained denim skirt, a T-shirt and hoodie, with flip-flops ‘cause it’s what’s in fashion, easy, or edgy. In making these choices, we pay homage to the god of fashion, an idol, and not to God who created us in his own image.

There is no honor, virtue, or glory in allowing or choosing to keep oneself in ignorance. If a thoughtless, careless, irreverent, disheveled, slovenly, or provocative appearance is deliberate, the choice is truly a serious matter of arrogance, defiance, rebellion, and the need for repentance.

“Witless Accomplices in Satan’s Efforts”

The fashion and image industries are based on the art of visual design in dress and grooming. The goal of praiseworthy visual design in dress is the creation of beauty and harmony with fabric and related materials—or so it used to be. Fashion today is too much about attitude and deconstruction—trash fashion that’s ripped, ragged, dirty, stained, faded, frayed, and raw. Instead of fashion coming together in modest, well-fitted, finished, attractive, handsome, or beautiful, harmonious garments, we’re now seeing body-baring, tight-fitting,

deconstructed clothes; underpants and undershirts sticking out; lingerie-style camisoles worn on the outside over t-shirts and instead of a blouse; clothes worn inside-out with tags and raw seams exposed; suit jackets worn with faded jeans, cargo-pants, pajamas, or brown-stained dirty denim pants. Each of these looks distracts or draws negative attention to itself and to the body, making a statement of defiance or rebellion.

Elder Spencer W. Kimball knew what was coming and did not mince words in warning, *“We are witless accomplices in Satan’s efforts to deconstruct the tradition for modest, beautiful styles in clothing to ragged jeans and T-shirts with stupid pictures . . .”* (“A Style of Our Own,” BYU, 13 February 1951).

With each new evidence of deterioration in appearance, many people lament the lower standard for a moment, expressing some dismay at the decline. Then we become accustomed to the look and tolerate it. Finally we forsake higher standards to embrace and adopt the look for ourselves. The adaptive process is called “habituation.” By definition, with exposure over a period of time, we come to accept what was once not acceptable. With stiff necks, what was once bad becomes seen as good, and what was good is seen as bad. The history of dress and image confirms this process. Oh, so easily and without question we are lulled into carnal security as we blindly follow the fashion.

“For behold, at that day shall he [the devil] rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good. And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell” (2 Nephi 28: 20-21).

“We Seek After These Things”

Regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity, we all share the privilege of being children of God, created in “His own image.” With this privilege comes the responsibility to look and act like a child of God, a follower of Christ and a temple to His name. Who’s on the Lord’s side, who? Image integrity is simply a matter of looking like who we say we are. The time is now, to act upon the standard stated in the Thirteenth Article of Faith, *“If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”* The time is now for all God’s children to raise the bar and stand for higher standards in dress, grooming, and body language—to stand and walk tall as an influence for good and having the courage to appear neatly groomed, orderly, attractively, and modestly dressed in harmony or agreement with eternal values. We can gradually and affordably acquire a workable wardrobe with styles that range from classic to creative, professional to play, for weekdays through Sunday as authentic and appropriate for individual lifestyle and personal style.

As wise stewards accountable to the Lord we have the responsibility to use our clothing and our countenance as valuable and enabling resources in provident living, to strengthen our families, and to aid us in the achievement of our worthy goals—both earthly and eternal. We can develop positive attitudes and more refined choices in dress, grooming, and body language—thoughtfully and carefully deciding what of the world to adopt, adapt, or avoid. We can better manage our investment in time, energy, and expense as we acquire basic knowledge, develop natural talent or basic skills, and practice image management, creating an image easily recognized as a child of God and disciple of Christ. *“For Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments”* (Doctrine & Covenants 82:14).