

ORNAMENTS & JEWELRY

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By D. A. DELAFIELD

IN THE July 10, 1855, REVIEW AND HERALD, the editor, James White, published an article, "On Dress, From Mr. Wesley's Advice to the People Called Methodists." The great holiness preacher appealed to Methodists to observe plainness and neatness in dress, avoiding "superfluities" and "mere ornaments." His counsel was for the people to "do every thing . . . with a single eye," that is, with a "single intention to please God." Christians were to move solely for God's glory.

Wesley based his emphasis on plainness in dress and appearance on the following words of our Lord: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:22, 23).

The word translated "single" in verse 22 is rendered "sound" in the Revised Standard Version and in many modern versions. *The SDA Bible Commentary* observes:

"A Christian whose spiritual 'eye' is 'single,' or 'sound,' is one whose insight and judgment make him a man of unaffected simplicity, artless, plain, and pure. He sees the things of time and eternity in true perspective:

A Single Eye

"Singleness of eyesight results in singleness of purpose, in wholehearted devotion to the kingdom of heaven and to the practice of its eternal principles (Phil. 3:8, 13, 14; MB 91). To be effective, vision must be focused and concentrated. In the same way, the man who desires true light in his soul must have his spiritual eyesight in sharp focus. Otherwise his vision will be blurred and his estimation of truth and duty will be faulty (see on Rev. 3:18)."—On Matt. 6:22.

The "evil" eye of verse 23 means "sick" or "in poor condition" as contrasted with "sound."

"A man with an 'evil' eye . . . is a man who keeps one 'eye on the hoarded treasures of earth and roll[s] the other proudly up to heaven.' Spiritually walleied, he sees double, with the result that he is double-minded (see on v. 24) and thinks it possible to enjoy all that earth has to offer and then to enter upon the eternal joys of heaven.

D. A. Delafield is an associate secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate.

Love of self has warped his vision to the extent that, like Eve, he sees things that are not so (see Gen. 3:6)."—*Ibid.*, on Matt. 6:23.

Returning to Wesley, the great man urged that Methodists should dress "agreeable to Christian humility, seriousness, and charity," in order that they might not misrepresent their Lord by double-minded behavior.

Regarding ornamentation and jewels, Wesley had this to say:

Wesley's Counsel

"I exhort you to wear no gold, no pearls, or precious stones . . . or costly apparel. . . . I advise those who are able to receive this saying, Buy no superfluities, no mere ornaments, though ever so much in fashion. Wear nothing, though you have it already, which is of a glaring color, or which is in any kind gay, glistening, or showy: nothing apt to attract the eyes of bystanders. I do not advise women to wear rings, earrings, necklaces, lace (of whatever kind or color). . . . Neither do I advise men to wear shining stockings, glittering or costly buckles or buttons. It is true these are little, very little things: therefore they are not worth defending: therefore give them up, let them drop, throw them away, without another word: else a little needle may cause much pain in the flesh, a little self-indulgence much hurt to your soul."

The foregoing words are quaint words, but forceful. The early Methodists took their leader's counsel seriously, much more so than Methodists and many other Protestants do today. And how are Adventists doing? I think that we are doing better perhaps than the Methodists, but before someone cries out against this as a vain boast please read the following:

"Warnings and reproofs are not given to the erring among Seventh-day Adventists because their lives are more blameworthy than are the lives of professed Christians of the nominal churches. . . , but because they have great light, and have by their profession taken their position as God's special, chosen people, having the law of God written in their hearts."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 452.

God expects more, much more, of the Advent people who have had great light than He does of others to whom, for example, the light of the Spirit of Prophecy has not come. And God has called the remnant church to present to the world in these final days of time a convincing re-enactment of the Christian life on earth with the backdrop of the three-

message of Revelation 14:6-12 remind us of the times in which we live. In the light of these facts how can we offer to the world a faulty example touching any shape or form of Christian witness!

On the matter of adornment and with reference to jewelry and cosmetics, the *Church Manual* states the Adventist position as follows:

"To dress plainly, abstaining from display of jewelry and ornaments of every kind is in keeping with our faith.—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 366. It is clearly taught in the Scriptures that the wearing of jewelry is contrary to the will of God. 'Not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array' is the admonition of the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 2:9). The wearing of ornaments of jewelry is a bid for attention which is not in keeping with Christian self-forgetfulness.

"In some countries the custom of wearing the marriage ring is considered imperative, having become, in the minds of the people, a criterion of virtue, and hence it is not regarded as an ornament. Under such circumstances we have no disposition to condemn the practice.

"Let us remember that it is not the 'outward adorning' which expresses true Christian character, but 'the hidden man of the heart . . . a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price' (1 Peter 3:3, 4). The use of common cosmetics not in keeping with good taste and the principles of Christian modesty should be avoided. Cleanliness and Christlike deportment should be observed in the care and grooming of the individual who is seeking at all times to please and rightly represent Christ our Lord."—Pages 211, 212.

The Wedding Ring Counsel

During the years 1885-1887 Ellen White and her son W. C. White worked in Western Europe. One evening in 1885 during an Adventist conference held in Basel, Switzerland, one of the ministers preached on plainness of dress and denounced the wearing of jewelry, including rings. A sister spoke up and asked if "wedding rings, too" were included. 'Yes, everything,' replied the ardent preacher in a sweeping statement.

W. C. White was present in this meeting and commented on the experience: "This raised quite a stir in the conference because with some the wearing of the wedding ring was regarded not as a matter of ornamentation, but as a token of loyalty, and when the question was brought to

Mother [Mrs. Ellen G. White], she said that where the wearing of the wedding ring was demanded by custom as a matter of loyalty, our preachers should not press the matter of its being laid aside."—W. C. White letter, Aug. 6, 1913.

This observation by Elder White harmonizes with the Ellen G. White statement written from Melbourne, Australia, in 1892 to "brethren and sisters" in America. (See *Testimonies to Ministers*, pages 180, 181, article titled "The Wedding Ring.")

"Some have had a burden in regard to the wearing of a marriage ring, feeling that the wives of our ministers should conform to this custom. All this is unnecessary. Let the ministers' wives have the golden link which binds their souls to Jesus Christ, a pure and holy character, the true love and meekness and godliness that are the fruit borne upon the Christian tree, and their influence will be secure anywhere. The fact that a disregard of the custom occasions remark is no good reason for adopting it. Americans can make their position understood by plainly stating that the custom is not regarded as obligatory in our country. We need not wear the sign, for we are not untrue to our marriage vow, and the wearing of the ring would be no evidence that we were true. I feel deeply over this leavening process which seems to be going on among us, in the conformity to custom and fashion. Not one penny should be spent for a circlet of gold to testify that we are married. *In countries where the custom is imperative, we have no burden to condemn those who have their marriage ring; let them wear it if they can do so conscientiously*; but let not our missionaries feel that the wearing of the ring will increase their influence one jot or tittle. If they are Christians, it will be manifest in their Christlikeness of character, in their words, in their works, in the home, in association with others; it will be evinced by their patience and long-suffering and kindness. They will manifest the spirit of the Master, they will possess His beauty of character, His loveliness of disposition, His sympathetic heart."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 180, 181. (Italics supplied.)

Returning to the W. C. White letter of 1913, he observes that at that time "Americans [Adventists] who had never worn the marriage ring were putting it on, and this was quite unnecessary because their standing was established among the people already. They had no husbands or fathers demanding that they wear

it, and there was no necessity for them to cater to the wishes of a few of their associates."

Whatever this may mean, one thing is sure—American Adventists, at least at that time, had no justifiable reason for using a wedding ring at all. And those Adventists who wore the ring were influenced by immigrants from other countries who held to the custom.

In the REVIEW of January 24, 1957, the editor pointed out the length to which the custom goes: "We would not say that the matter of a wedding ring is a major matter, by denominational standards. Accordingly, little has appeared on the subject in the REVIEW. On the other hand, we should never forget that departures from simplicity never come all in one day. A study of other religious bodies that once were strict in their rules on dress and deportment, and that now are lax, should put us on guard when any move is made to lower our standards. It is not a far step, for example, from wedding rings to engagement rings, and from both of these to other rings, and from all of these to earrings. We believe that in this matter, as in many others, our safety lies, not in seeing how near we can come to the treacherous edge of the road, but how far we can stay away."—F. D. NICHOL, REVIEW AND HERALD, Jan. 24, 1957.

Think, now, of Paul's counsel to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 8:13). There may be found a helpful principle. The apostle teaches the concept of Christian responsibility for influences we exert among fellow believers. His point of emphasis was diet, not dress, but the lesson is the same.

Said Paul, "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." The *New English Bible* reads, "And therefore, if food be the downfall of my brother, I will never eat meat any more, for I will not be the cause of my brother's downfall."

Have you ever given up anything that you prized—even though you didn't see anything wrong with it—just because you didn't want to be a stumbling block to a loved one or another human soul? And as you acted unselfishly, abandoning certain practices, suddenly you discovered the reasons why God spoke as He did?

The words, "I will not be the cause of my brother's downfall," is just another way of stating the golden rule. And what we do with the above counsel may very well be another way of practicing it. ↔