

A Philosophy of Dress

Wherever two or more are gathered for any purpose there will be some thought given to a standard of dress. Each home has an unwritten dress code that has evolved over a period of time. Each organization at some point has to make some statement about what they expect in terms of the clothing choices of the members of that organization. Cortland Christian Academy is no exception to this issue. Because clothing choices are often seen as a right of personal identity, there needs to be some statement of purpose that gives the reasons why an organization such as Cortland Christian Academy specifies its particular code. That is the purpose of this article.

In articulating a philosophy of dress it needs to be stressed that Cortland Christian Academy does not equate spirituality with a certain style of clothing. The dress code of the academy is designed to prevent some of the abuses that individuals will introduce if clothing is allowed to become a personal statement of individuality or prestige. It is also designed to create an atmosphere of academic seriousness as opposed to a muddle of fads and status symbols. The wearing of clothing within the prescribed boundaries does not indicate that a person is right with God. It does, however, indicate that a person is willing to adjust himself to the direction of the organization. This is an important character quality to develop in light of workplace realities beyond the school years. Having said that, there are five basic principles that come into play in the dress code at Cortland Christian Academy. They are principles that allow our dress code to flex with the culture without becoming vulnerable to the latest whims of the marketplace.

First, there is **the principle of purpose**. This is a common sense principle. Clothing is designed to accomplish two things. One, it is designed for protection. Two, it is designed to function in a particular setting—the work place, the playground, the home. There are also spiritual purposes with regard to clothing. In 1 Timothy 2:9, modesty is brought forward as a primary consideration in the choosing of our wardrobe. The passage is directed to women and, by the ideal of the exemplary role of leadership, it applies to men as well. We live in an increasingly impudent and immodest culture, but there is no Scriptural permission to adapt to that culture in those areas. Spiritually, there is also the matter of identification. On occasion in Scripture (eg. Proverbs 7:10) people are recognized or identified by their choice of clothing. In any era a Christian must be alert to styles that are linked to wrong lifestyles or philosophies at that particular time. As a Christian school we choose not to give the impression of the acceptance of or association with such lifestyles or philosophies by permitting students to promote them in their fashion choices.

Building on this we move to the **second** principle, **the principle of first impression**. In Matthew 7:16-20 Jesus speaks at length about identifying people on the basis of their choices (fruit). It is an unavoidable fact that everyone makes judgment calls on the basis of how we choose to dress. When people opt to wear bizarre styles of clothing or accessories they make it necessary for others to work through questions before they can get to know them. Sometimes people are unwilling to work through those questions. In that case a person's clothing choice may have denied them an opportunity to meet someone who could have been important in their life. On a broader level, visitors to the Academy will take with them a first impression of the school as a whole on the basis of the dress of its students and faculty. It is the Academy's desire to have its students individually and the school corporately present a positive first impression. It should be noted that there is an impression that is difficult to avoid. When a person seems to be driven to have the latest style or to adopt the latest fad, that person gives strong signals that he may well be vulnerable to marketing. It is so very important for parents to recognize this and to try to help their students enter the adult world free from the need to yield to the latest sales phenomenon. The Academy's dress code can help parents work on this matter with their children.

The third principle has to do with **eye appeal**. Scripture emphasizes two important features of the human body. One is the face (countenance – Proverbs 15:13). The other is the eye (Proverbs 15:30). The gist of God’s Word would seem to be that we should dress in such a way as to draw people’s attention to our face. Then, when they look at our face, there should be something worth seeing in terms of a pleasant and gracious expression. This emphasis runs contrary to the designer goals of our culture. The objective of many styles today is to create eye teasers. This is accomplished through out-of-place features in clothing that draw the eye to or focus attention on other parts of the anatomy other than the face. It is also accomplished by the eye-catching exposure of skin. In our effort to have a wholesome dress code, Cortland Christian Academy seeks to have a policy that will make the school setting a place where people will not need to be concerned about being embarrassed or tempted by what will be seen as they walk through our corridors.

The fourth principle is the principle of respect. The frequent references to “honor” in the Bible (Romans 13:7) leave no doubt that respect for others is to be a part of a person’s character. With regard to clothing, every culture has a defined way of demonstrating respect through the way that they dress. Granted, some cultures have become so corrupted that even their respectful dress is scripturally unacceptable. Nevertheless, there is still a sense of respect. In current cultural changes in this country respect does not seem to play a significant role. Consequently, there is no emerging dress for respect on the immediate horizon. That means that Cortland Christian Academy will continue to advance dress that is still clearly understood as respectful in an educational setting.

Finally, there is **the principle of place** – 1 Peter 2:13; 5:5. At the bottom line the place where one chooses to study or work has the option of establishing a dress code. Because of that, those who choose to be involved in that organization accept the responsibility to work with that code unless it calls on them to dress immorally, immodestly, or unsafely. While submission to a dress code is not necessarily a sign of spirituality, the unnecessary resistance to a dress code does indicate a personal problem that needs to be addressed. Life calls for many choices that we might prefer not to make. One may prefer a certain style as their wardrobe of choice, but to choose to work in or attend an organization where those items are unacceptable means that the wardrobe of choice is replaced with the wardrobe of requirement. To promise to comply with an organization’s dress code and then seek to push the limits does not express individuality, it expresses bad ethics. It is our hope that this article will help you to understand and think through the spirit behind Cortland Christian Academy’s dress code. It is also our hope that you would feel that you could work with this code and help your student learn the importance of principles of dress in the workplace.