

THE USE OF JEWELRY: BIBLICAL AND ELLEN WHITE'S VIEWS

INTRODUCTION

Wearing of jewelry has been a subject of controversy among Christians of all ages. While some denominations advocate a non-use of jewelry others lend a support towards a modest use of it. There has been a polarization of views on this subject. Many keep asking, why do not some believers wear ear rings, wedding bands and necklaces? Does God instruct not to use it? This article: "The Use of Jewelry: Biblical and Ellen White's Views" will examine critically and objectively biblical texts and Ellen White's perceptions on jewelry and its use.

Generally, the words 'jewels' or 'jewelry' translated in the Old Testament do not refer primarily to precious stones as such, but simply to some type of personal adornment fashioned from a precious metal, such as gold or silver.¹ However, from time immemorial, people have sought to enhance their appearance through the use of jewelry, make up, ornamented clothing and other adornments.² It is noted that these "ornaments sometimes symbolized wealth or favour, or were worn as amulets by pagans".³

The Use of Jewelry in the Old Testament

The following uses for jewelry in the Old Testament, is based primarily on the work of Angel Manuel Rodriguez:

1. Personal beautification- Rodriguez mentions the high priest's costume. It is specifically noted that one of the basic purposes of this special and unique attire was to beautify this religious leader. (Exodus 28: 2).
2. Currency- Rodriguez argued that the 'gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels given by Abraham's servant to Rebekah was a payment for watering his camels (Gen 24:22).
3. Evidence of Wealth- In ancient Mesopotamia, the bride price paid by a prospective groom's family included clothing, jewelry, food, drink, and

1 Siegfried H.Horn, "Jewelry", Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Dictionary. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

2 "What does the Bible say about: Jewelry, Make up & Other Adornments. ``www.Biblicalprophecies.net. (Assessed on 10/12/2013).

3 Ibid.

oil. Jewelry was also part of the dowry paid by the bride's family. (Gen. 24:53).

4. A symbol of social status- It was used by the people belonging to the high strata of society particularly those from the palace. In 2 Samuel 1:10, King Saul wore a crown and armband. Rodriguez asserts that the jewelry mentioned in Ezekiel 28:11-19 (in connection with the King of Tyre) signifies royal or princely status.
5. Jewelry also served as a sign of authority.
6. Jewelry had religious significance in the Ancient Near East. Jewelry identified the religious beliefs or position of the wearer, such as the Israelite high priest. It was assigned supernatural abilities and was worn to protect the wearer from various forms of evil. Rodriguez identifies some of the jewelry mentioned in Isaiah 3:16-21 as supernatural ornaments, also called amulets. It is these amulets that the Old Testament condemns as idolatry.
7. Jewelry was sometimes used as an offering to the gods to be placed on their images in their temples. While the Old Testament does not mention this use directly, the Israelites did occasionally bring jewelry to God, as in Numbers 31:50.¹

In his book, *Jewelry and some Christian Virtues*, Oyinloye asserts that the use of jewelry did not originate with man but God. He argued that God did not only create precious stones but demonstrated its usage. Ezekiel, in his presentation of Lucifer under the symbol of the king of Tyre, portrayed him as one graciously bedecked with highly priced stones (Ezekiel 28:12,13). The passage indicates that the jewelry actually started in heaven with a "covering cherub".²

It is further noted that Lucifer was the only heavenly being adorned like that. This was since every precious stone (jewel) that Lucifer was adorned with reflects certain characteristic of God. The gold he was ornamented with symbolized "righteousness" (Rev 3:18; 19:8). The blue colour of his sapphire stands for "true-blue loyalty". (Psalm 89:2; Esther 8:5; Num 15:38,39). It then follows that Lucifer could perfectly wear the jewels in heaven being perfect in the beauty of character in an unfallen society dwelling in the presence of God.³

Extra biblical sources on man's usage of jewelry traced its origin to superstition. Jewelries were worn not for adornment but to ward off evil forces

1 Scott Severance, "What Does the Bible Say About Jewelry?" www.scottseverance.us/ministry/jewelry.html Assessed on 10/12/2013.

2 J. M.A Oyinloye, *Jewelry and Some Christian Virtues*. (Lagos, Nigeria: Emaphine Reprographics Limited, 2002), pp. 5,6.

³ Ibid. p.6.

because it was superstitiously associated with magical powers. Thus wearing of jewelry is idolatry because the wearer puts his trust in the created thing and not the Creator. Oyinloye stresses that wearing of amethyst is believed to prevent drunkenness and diamond was worn for strength in battle. Ruby was for love and happiness. The jewel is also believed to protect the wearer against betrayals and poverty. All these show that jewelry invented by man was not strictly for beauty but for idolatrous purposes.¹

Jewelry Spoken of in a Negative Sense

In 1 Peter 3:1-6, Peter contrasts true beauty with false. He says, “your beauty should reside, not in outward adornment – the braiding of the hair, or jewellery [sic], or dress – but – in the inmost centre [sic] of your being, with its imperishable ornament, a gentle, quiet spirit, which is of high value in the sight of God” (3:3,4, NEB). In other words, real beauty that lasts comes from inner virtues, not outer appearance.² Further, 1 Timothy 2:9,10 says “I also [in addition to asking men to pray] want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship”.(NIV) Rodriguez argues that Paul is listing a general principle in 1 Timothy 2:9a and following it up with specific examples (braided hair, jewelry, and expensive clothes).³

Ellen White’s Teachings on Jewelry:

Having examined the biblical teachings on jewelry and its use, the focus will now be on what Ellen White teaches about jewelry. Ellen White teaches compliance with the Scriptural injunctions, avoidance of costly adornment, and inner beauty.

1. Compliance with the Scripture: Ellen White affirms the words of Peter in 1 Peter 3:1-6. She comments, “it is God who condescends to give us these instructions; they are the declarations of Infinite Wisdom, and those who disregard them do so at their own peril and loss”.⁴ White stresses, “all that we urge is compliance with the injunctions of God’s word.”⁵ According to her, those who are too

¹ Ibid., p.8.

² Severance, p. 41

³ Severance, p.42.

⁴ E.G White, Testimonies for The Church. Vol.4, (Canada: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948) p.645.

⁵ Ibid., p.644.

conscientious to wear jewelry are regarded as narrow-minded, superstitious, and even fanatical.¹

2. Avoidance of Costly Adornment: White posits that Christians are not to decorate themselves with costly array or expensive ornaments.² She maintains that “to dress plainly, and abstain from display of jewelry and ornaments of every kind is in keeping with our faith”.³
3. Inner Beauty: White posits that “there is an ornament that will never perish, that will promote the happiness of all around us in this life, and will shine with undimmed luster in the immortal future. It is the adorning of a meek and lowly spirit.⁴ Further, she buttresses that “the apostle (Paul) places the outward adorning in direct contrast with a meek and quiet spirit and then testifies of the comparative value of the latter: ‘In the sight of God of great price’.⁵
4. Wedding Ring: Mrs. White discouraged the wearing of wedding ring except:
 - i. In countries where it was seen to be a matter of imperative social obligation, and
 - ii. Where Christians could wear it in good conscious.⁶

In *Testimonies to Ministers*, E .G White made the following statements:

Some have had a burden regarding the wearing of a marriage ring, feeling that the wives of our ministers should conform to this custom. All this is unnecessary. Let the minister’s 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. 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

1 Ibid., p.645.

2 E.G White, *Evangelism* (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946) p.269.

3 Ibid.

4 *Testimonies*, Vol.4, p.643.

5 Ibid., p.645.

6 Oyinloye, p. 11

will increase their influence one jot or title. If they are Christians, it will be manifest in their Christ-likeness of character.¹

Admonition to the Youth:

Ellen White counsels the youth, “Dear youth, a disposition in you to dress according to the fashion, and to wear lace and gold and artificial for display, will not recommend to others your religion or the truth that you profess. People of discernment will look upon your attempts to beautify the external as proof of weak minds and proud hearts².

Self Denial:

White counsels that “those who have bracelets, and wear gold and ornaments had better take these idols from their persons and sell them, even if it should be for much less than they gave for them, and thus practice self-denial. Time is too short to adorn the body with gold or silver or costly apparel”.³

In correcting those who use jewelry, Ellen White counsels that those who seek to correct others should present the attractions of Jesus. They should talk of his love and compassion, present His example and sacrifice, reveals His Spirit, and they need not touch the subject of dress at all. When the heart is converted, everything that is out of harmony with the Word of God will drop off.⁴

Conclusion

It is observed that there is no express command in the Bible regarding the use of jewelry. Likewise, it is evident from Ellen White’s writings that she discourages the use of jewelry but encourages inner beauty which fades not but rather glorifies God. It is good to look beautiful. However, natural beauty without artificial enhancements is better.

¹ Oyinloye, pp.11,12.

² E.G White, *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol.3 (California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948) p. 376.

³ E.G White, *Selected Messages*, Bk 3. Washington, D.C: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

⁴ White, *Evangelism*, p. 272.

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