



## The Tea Test

By Lucy Wall

*One day I was chatting to a Christian acquaintance of mine when he mentioned how his wife felt quite strongly about the subject of “appropriate attire” for Christians. As I walked home later that day I started to think about my own journey in this slightly grey area. At this point in time I had been walking with the Lord for six years and I started to think about how Jesus had really worked in my heart regarding this topic. I know for many people the issue of appearance really isn’t a big deal but for me it was something I felt I really needed to examine in those early months of my Christian life.*

*To put things into context, when I gave my heart to Jesus I was a youthful twenty four year old living in London, performing in the West End show “Chicago” and therefore was immersed in the image conscious world of Performing Arts. Taking into consideration that your image can very much influence how successful you are in this profession and can sometimes even dictate whether you get the job or not, you could say I had an invested interested in how I presented myself to the world. I wouldn’t say it consumed me but it was rather high up on my priority list and what I wore could at times be influenced by quite a worldly perspective.*

*When I dedicated my life to Jesus however, one of the first things I questioned was “what would be “appropriate” to wear as a Christian?” As a “baby” in the Lord, I was just beginning to discover my new identity in Christ. Subsequently I found myself going through a time of wondering whether being a Christian meant I had to stop dressing the way I **wanted** to and instead have to start wearing dowdy, shapeless clothes that would be deemed more “appropriate.” Thankfully the Holy Spirit stepped in and proved to be a wonderful teacher on how to glorify God through self expression!*

*Looking back, it was a gradual process and it had nothing to do with legalism. No one was telling me “you can or can’t wear this” or “you should or shouldn’t look like that.” It was because I now found that I **wanted** to make sure I was dressed appropriately for my God and the only voice speaking to me on this subject was the voice of the Holy Spirit. I felt that if my image was screaming the message “look at me!” then how could I ask people to focus on the far more important message of “look at Jesus?” The two didn’t seem to go together to me but neither did I find the thought of spending the rest of my life in frumpy, plain clothing particularly appealing!*

*What you see of the “outer person” is very often a reflection of what’s going on with the “inner person” so I wanted to make sure these two areas were sending the same signals so that I’d be able to tell people about Jesus without feeling like a hypocrite. My desire was to find a happy medium where I still felt that I could keep individuality and youth in my appearance but without compromising myself as a Christian and as someone who professes godliness.*

*As I’ve grown in the Lord over the years I’ve found that my desires and areas of focus have changed greatly. Don’t get me wrong, I still love to go shopping as much as the next girl but I certainly don’t face the same dilemmas like I used to! When it comes to taking care of my appearance I feel much more settled and confident in who I am in Christ. This was not the case however in the first year of my Christian walk and it was something that I felt I needed to address if I was going to be an effective witness for Jesus.*

*For this reason, I decided to write this poem in retrospect and from my early Christian point of view. My hope is that it may be able to encourage anyone else who may be going through a similar experience no matter how long they’ve been walking with the Lord or whether they’re male or female. I don’t think it’s an issue that’s gender specific or even necessarily just to do with clothing but rather it’s an issue of expressing what’s in our heart.*

*Through prayer and God’s gentle teaching I found a way that allowed me to be at peace with God and also with my appearance. I’m not claiming to have an irrefutable technique that will work for everyone (or even to being a particularly stylish dresser!) it’s just a light-hearted poem that describes a process that I went through. I wish to share the point of view that there can be joy and liberation in self expression and individuality as well as walking hand in hand with our Saviour. After all, our Creator doesn’t stifle us and put us in a box; He gives us space to express our unique personalities, reveals to us who we really are and sets us free!*



So Jesus is my Saviour now, my life belongs to Him.  
I've opened up my heart and I've repented of my sin.  
I'm glad I'm on this path and I accept the Bible's truth.  
I'm grateful that He's found me while I still have years of youth!

Now every week to Church I go, I feel as light as air!  
But then I start to wonder, "What's appropriate to wear?"  
I've never questioned this before, I'd do just as I please.  
But something now is different and I don't feel quite at ease.

The tabloids say to "Strut my stuff" and "Flaunt what I've been given!"  
But now I fear that this is not a godly way of living.  
So now that I'm a Christian do I dress just like a nun?  
Be donned in black from head to toe and ruin all the fun?

A common misconception which I've heard asked rather smugly;  
"Don't Christians dress in dowdy clothes and aren't they always ugly?"  
"A Christian's not allowed nice clothes, it's seen as too enticing!  
You have to always look depressed or else you're too inviting."

A sweeping, worldly statement and so wrong in many ways!  
If beauty only lies in clothes we live in troubled days!  
But still, there *is* the interest to take care of one's appearance  
And not feel like all clothes must come from sales entitled "Clearance!"

Why bless me with my freedom then to stifle me in black?  
And sentence me to life where all I wear is one big sack!  
I can't say this appeals or sounds like something I should do.  
These "rules" don't sound like anything that God would put me through.

No, God created genders and He set us both apart.  
He made us male and female and he put this in each heart.  
I wish to honour God without inviting dullest tedium.  
I give it up in prayer for there must be a happy medium!

I want to find a balance where I honour Jesus' name,  
But still appreciate His gifts, in this there is no shame!  
And then there's my desire where I want to find a spouse.  
I can't do that in clothes I'd only wear around the house!



But if a man is looking at the body parts I flaunt,  
If *that's* what turns his head, is that the kind of man I want?  
What happens when my skin grows old, my face looks less than fresh?  
I'd rather he took interest in my *character* than flesh.

For if I want a marriage that's secure and everlasting,  
I'd like a *deeper* love with an attraction longer lasting!  
I put God first and know that I can find a way demure.  
A woman seeking God *can* dress in stylish ways I'm sure!

And so with prayer I find how to decipher what is best.  
I ask myself the question; does this outfit pass "The Tea Test?"  
Please let me clarify and tell you and what I mean by this.  
If I were meeting God for tea, would I turn up in this?

Would I feel at ease with God and perfectly composed?  
Or would I be ashamed at what my flashy outfit shows?  
For if I start to shift and feel I have to rearrange,  
That's probably the perfect sign that I should go and change!

For if I'm out in public in a small, tight, skimpy thing,  
How can I then represent my righteous God and King?  
If I said "I'm a Christian!" Would a stranger be surprised?  
For if my clothes don't match my talk I'd say I'm compromised.

If I can't share the Gospel due to unwise sense of dress,  
I may be out of line for one proclaiming godliness.  
But if I know I'd meet with God and wear this comfortably  
I know I'm fine for in real life Christ's *always* there with me!

He sees me every day and knows exactly what I wear!  
He watches me put make-up on and how I style my hair.  
A saying that I've heard before I'd like to now repeat it;  
"If the barn door needs a lick of paint then go ahead and paint it!"

A little bit of care won't mean I'm catching every eye,  
But won't ask God to share me with whoever's walking by!  
I'd rather wear my *love* for God for everyone to see  
Than clothes for all occasions with the message: "Look at me!"



I realise my body isn't mine to flaunt and show,  
For Jesus paid a price for me and now to Him I owe  
Everything I have in life, He set me free from sin.  
And now my heart's desire is to praise and worship Him.

So when one comes to Christ and starts to question their dress sense,  
The "Frumpy/Flashy" battle is what often will commence!  
But God has *liberated* us and as the fairer sex,  
The case of "what to wear," it doesn't have to be complex.

I make the most of things without offending the vicinity.  
I dress to honour God but without staunching femininity!  
So what should be the dress code for the one God calls His daughter?  
I think for me the rule will be: let's flatter it, not flaunter!

*Romans 12:1*

*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."*