

# What does the Bible say about wearing jewelry?

The UPC, along with many other holiness groups, teaches against wearing jewelry. I know that when I was in the movement I took the teaching for granted. I think that many others did as well. If new converts asked questions then the general answer went something like this: "It's an inward change of the heart that is reflected by an outward change of appearance; as Christians we are called to be separate from the world." Alternatively, the new convert might be given a well-meaning lesson on respecting pastoral authority even if we do not "see it for ourselves." If the person questioning is not a new convert then they are often judged as being "cold on God" or "lukewarm." I am ashamed to admit that I was often guilty of judging people that way.

When I was part of the apostolic Pentecostal movement I happily went along with the doctrine of no jewelry without really questioning it. I had this vague idea that there was biblical support for it. There must be, right? Otherwise, why would we be teaching it? It was not until I began to question many of the doctrines of the UPC that I studied the no-jewelry doctrine for myself. When I did, I was surprised to find out that there is literally no biblical support for the doctrine. In fact, the Bible has more *good* to say about jewelry than it does bad!

In this article I will share some Scriptures and make some comments. I think that the Scriptures will speak for themselves, but hopefully you will find my comments beneficial. As always, I encourage you to study Scripture and formulate your own opinions.

# What Do Holiness Organizations Say About Jewelry?

First, let's look at what the UPC and a couple of other apostolic holiness organizations have to say about jewelry. The doctrinal section of the UPC's Web site says:

*[The Christian woman] has dedicated herself to the cause of Christianity. This manner of dedication avoids expensive, extravagant clothing and superfluous, ornamental jewelry, permitting only the functional use of a wristwatch and a wedding band to designate her wedlock (([United Pentecostal Church International – Modesty](#), Accessed 2006-12-22)).*

Their conclusion comes from these two passages: 1 Tim. 2:8-10 and 1 Pet. 3:1-5. I will come back to those Scriptures in a moment.

The Articles of Faith of the ALJC—an organization that allows its member churches more autonomy on how much jewelry they allow—also cites 1 Pet. 3:1-5 as “instruction to wives about their behavior and appearance.” (([Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ](#), Accessed 2008-06-23)) They conclude that “Holiness is not only an inward presence of God but it is also reflected in the outward life of the Christian in his conduct in this world.” On the surface this is a very generic statement, and one that every Christian would agree with. In practice, though, the “outward life” is translated into a dress code.

The Articles of Faith of the WPF says:

*The glory of the female believer is manifested, among other ways, through the emanation of the divine glory in her appearance (I Peter 3:3,4). All artifice is viewed as obstruction to her authentic beauty and is to be avoided (I Timothy 2:9,10). Jewelry, (I Timothy 2:9), make-up, (II Kings 9:3) dyes, and any other artificiality, as well as immodest*

*apparel, are viewed as attempts to artificially induce beauty (Isaiah 3:16-24 RSV, I Peter 3:1-5) and replace the lost glow of God's glory as seen in the face of the believer as well as in the heavens. All this is Scripturally associated with Jezebel, who is both an Old Testament (I Kings 18:4, 19:1-2, II Kings 9:7,30), as well as New Testament, example of seduction and artificiality (Revelation 2:20,22). Thus, "cosmetics," derived from "cosmos" (arrangement, as in the universe) are attempts to "make-up" the sparkle and glow, which is normative in the presence of the living God as well as within the believer (Philippians 2:15) (([Worldwide Pentecostal Fellowship](#), Accessed 2008-06-23)).*

It is clear that out of the three views the WPF's is both the most restrictive and the one with the most Scripture citations. I could write an entire article responding just to the things that the WPF said in the above quotation (and I probably will). For now I would just like to point out two things. First, Jezebel was never condemned for her artificiality; she was condemned for trying to kill the prophets of God (Rev. 2:20). It is Western society that has associated Jezebel with extreme make-up and jewelry; that idea is not found in the Bible. Second, Phil. 2:14-15 is talking about not grumbling and disputing. The reason Paul says not to grumble and dispute is because we "appear as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15). To say that I think it is a logical stretch to teach that cosmetics are wrong because they make us sparkle and glow would be an understatement. (Come to think of it, I've never seen any cosmetics that make someone glow; I think it would be pretty cool.)

If we exclude the WPF's connection between cosmetics and artificial glowing then it becomes apparent that there are only two passages that are used to support the no-jewelry (or limited jewelry) rule: 1 Tim. 2:8-10 and 1 Pet. 3:1-5. I will deal with those two passages in a moment, but first let's look at some Scriptures that the holiness groups probably never

showed you.

## **Some Scriptures Your Pastor Never Showed You:**

*Ezekiel 16:8-15, NASB*

*Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine, declares the Lord God. Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I also clothed you with embroidered cloth and put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk. **I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a necklace around your neck. I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you, declares the Lord God. But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be willing. ((New American Standard Bible : 1995 Update. LaHabra, CA : The Lockman Foundation, 1995))***

*Song of Solomon 1:10-11, NASB*

***“Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, Your neck with strings of beads. We will make for you ornaments of gold With beads of silver.”***

*Pro 1:8-9 NASB*

*Hear, my son, your father’s instruction And do not forsake your mother’s teaching; Indeed, **they are a graceful wreath to***

*your head And ornaments about your neck.*

*Son 7:1 NASB*

*"How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince's daughter! The curves of your hips are like jewels, The work of the hands of an artist.*

*Isa 61:10 NASB*

*I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

*Isa 49:18 NASB*

*"Lift up your eyes and look around; All of them gather together, they come to you. As I live," declares the LORD, "You will surely put on all of them as jewels and bind them on as a bride.*

Now, when I read these Scriptures I asked myself a question: If jewelry is so sinful, then how come God repeatedly used it as an analogy of beauty? If it's such a sin to wear jewelry then why would God promise to clothe people with "garments of salvation...as a bride adorns herself with jewels"? If jewelry's a sin then isn't God making some really, really bad analogies?

To put it another way, if jewelry is bad, then was God really saying, "I'm going to give my bride a bunch of jewels, and they'll make her look really beautiful, but she'd better not wear them because they're bad!" Or, "Wow, my bride rocks, the curve of her hips are like jewels! Too bad she can't wear jewels because it's a sin."

Isn't it a stretch to think that God would make these analogies if jewelry is bad?

## Does the Bible Ever Say That Wearing Jewelry Is A Sin?

This is a really important question. You see, everything that is a sin in the New Testament was also a sin in the Old Testament Law (I.E. Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy). Let me say that again: *Everything that is a sin in the New Testament was also a sin in the Old Testament Law.*

Now, the converse is not true. Everything that was a sin in the Old Testament Law was *not* necessarily a sin in the New Testament. The reason is because the Mosaic Law was broken into three parts: Moral, Ceremonial, and Penal. The moral law was (for the most part) what we call the 10 Commandments, as well as commands against fornication, homosexuality, drunkenness, and so on; the ceremonial law involved the sacrifices, the foods that a person could eat, whether or not you could dig your donkey out of a ditch on the Sabbath, and things like that; the penal law gave the penalties for breaking the moral or ceremonial law. ((International Standard Bible Encyclopedia , James Orr, M.A., D.D., General Editor, "Law In the New Testament"))

When Jesus came on the scene He fulfilled the ceremonial law and the penal law. He did *not* fulfill the moral law. ((Ibid.)) Instead, He "put [His] laws upon [our] heart[s]" (Heb. 10:16 NASB).

I said all of that to say this: You cannot find a sin in the New Testament that was not also a sin in the Old Testament Law. The reason is simple—the Law defines sin! Paul put it this way: "I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet" (Rom. 7:7 NASB).

Now let's get back to my original question: Does the Bible ever say that wearing jewelry is a sin? The answer is apparently "No." The Bible never says that jewelry is a sin.

For that matter, it has more good to say about jewelry than it does bad!

## So What Does The Bible Say?

As I showed at the start of this article, the no jewelry (or limited jewelry) doctrine is defended by two Scripture passages: 1 Tim. 2:8-10 and 1 Pet. 3:1-5. Before we look at those passages, though, please allow me to make one brief point. If I thought that the Bible even hinted that jewelry is a sin then I would be one of the doctrine's strongest defenders. When I was in the apostolic movement I never had any desire to wear jewelry; I never cared one way or the other. So please do not think that this article is about me wanting to wear jewelry, or me "rebellious," or anything like that. Because it's not.

With that said, let's look at 1 Tim. 2:8-10 and 1 Pet. 3:1-5. Let's do 1 Pet. 3:1-5 first.

*1Pe 3:1-5 NASB*

*In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.*

Now, when presented with a passage such as this, we have two options. The first option is to assume that the author is presenting a principle, and that the examples that he uses to illustrate the principles are just that: examples. The second

option is to assume that the author is laying down a set of rules, and that he expects people to take him literally. The one thing that is *not* an option is to take part of the passage literally and part of it figuratively—yet that is exactly what the UPC and other holiness organizations frequently do.

For example, if Peter expects us to take him literally then we need to do just that. If he is speaking literally, and he is laying down rules, then here is what we can glean:

1. Peter is speaking only to wives. The things that he is saying do not apply to single women.
2. Wives cannot braid their hair.
3. Wives cannot wear **gold** jewelry (other kinds are presumably allowed).
4. Wives must not wear dresses.

That is option one.

Option two is that Peter is using fancy hair styles, gold jewelry, and fancy clothes as examples because they help him make his point. If option two is correct then we can glean these principles:

1. Peter is speaking specifically to wives—especially those who have unsaved husbands—but the principle can apply to us all.
2. His principle is that we should not focus on our outer appearance—on our lavish hairdos, fancy clothes, and expensive jewelry—but we should instead focus on cultivating “chaste and respectful behavior.”

I will let you decide which of those two options is correct. All that I will say is that one of them *has* to be correct. I want to stress again that it is illogical and absurd to read this passage and pull one word out—jewelry—and teach that it is wrong while maintaining that braided hair and dresses are alright.



Now let's look at 1 Tim. 2:8-10:

*1Ti 2:8-10 NASB*

*Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness.*

We are once again presented with two options. Is Paul using braided hair, gold, pearls and costly garments as examples in order to make a broader point, or is he laying down a set of rules?

If he is laying down a set of rules then this is what we can glean:

1. Men always have to lift their hands when they pray. Furthermore, they cannot lift their hands if there is any wrath or dissension in their heart.
2. Women must dress modestly and discreetly.
3. Women must not braid their hair.
4. Women must not wear gold or pearls.
5. Women must not wear costly garments.
6. Women must wear good works (what store do you buy those in?).

There are a couple of problems with the first option. One might reasonably wonder how a woman can wear good works. On the other hand, if Paul is making a broader point, and he is just using braided hair, gold, pearls and costly garments as an example, then this is what we can glean:

1. Men need to cultivate a holy attitude. When they pray they should examine their hearts and make sure that they are not harboring any wrath or dissension.
2. Women need to do the same thing. They need to make sure

that they are focusing on the inside and not the outside. They need to dress modestly and discreetly. If they are poor then they need to not worry about not having gold and pearls and servants to give them fancy hairdos, and they should be content that they can dress modestly. If they are rich then they should not focus on their gold and pearls and fancy hairdos—they might even want to consider getting rid of some of that and helping folks out who are in need. That's good works, and that's what a godly woman should be worried about.

Now you might disagree with my broader interpretation of what Paul is saying to women, and that's fine if you do. But my original point remains the same. Either Paul is speaking literally or he is making a broader point using examples that were common for his day. It's one or the other, it can't be both at the same time. It makes no sense to say, "Paul said don't wear gold or pearls but it's OK if we braid our hair!" That makes no sense at all.

## **Conclusion**

Do you see how ridiculous this gets? The UPC and associated organizations allow women to braid their hair, but they don't allow them to wear most jewelry. They allow women to wear "costly dresses," even though Peter said they shouldn't wear dresses at all (if we take him literally). Most of them allow women to wear gold wedding bands, almost all of them allow gold watches, and every single one allows gold-rimmed glasses, but they won't let them wear a silver necklace (even though neither Peter or Paul said anything about silver).

Folks, I have a name for this sort of teaching: Hypocrisy. Apostolic Pentecostal organizations have no problem taking Scriptures figuratively when it fits their agenda. They have no problem saying that when Stephen saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God he was speaking figuratively. They have no problem saying that Paul was giving a cultural command when he

commanded (on four separate occasions) for brothers to greet each other with a holy kiss. They have no problem saying that women can talk in church even though Paul specifically commanded against it.

And you know what? I agree with the UPC's interpretation of those passages. I do think that the command for brothers to kiss each other was entirely cultural. I do think that Paul's command for women not to speak in church was a command for order in the church, and the reason that he specifically commanded women not to speak was because of the cultural norms of his day. I do agree with the Oneness Pentecostals **and Trinitarians** when they say that God the Father does not have a physical body. Frankly, I don't know what Stephen saw, but the one thing that I do *not* think he saw was two Gods. Two Gods is both logically and Scripturally impossible, and the Trinitarians would agree with me on that.

Folks, God gave us a brain...let's use it! At some point we have to step back and look at a Scripture passage and capture the meaning as well as the words! If one steps back and just reads the passage with an open mind then it becomes clear that Peter and Paul were saying the exact same thing: Both men and women should be focused on cultivating inward holiness and not outward beauty! We should dress modestly and discreetly and avoid gaudiness and extravagance so that people can see our good deeds and our good behavior.

## **Conclusion:**

If you are an apostolic woman reading this article, and you feel that God has led you to not wear jewelry, then I want you to know that I am not ridiculing you at all. You have my respect. My problem is not with you, it is with a religious system that creates man-made rules and regulations and then demands that people follow them. My problem is with a religious system that adds to the offense of the Cross. My problem is with any denomination, organization, or church that

creates barriers between the lost and God.

You have heard my opinion of the subject, but if you would like to read "the other side of the story" then you can do so at these two links:

- <http://www.upci.org/doctrine/scripturesModesty.asp> – This is the UPCI's official position on clothing, jewelry, and hair.
- <http://www.apostolic.edu/biblestudy/files/bwahprt3.htm> – This is a Bible study written by a Oneness Pentecostal minister. It is not an official paper from the UPC, but it does give a very good overview of the sort of teaching that goes on in holiness churches. (*By the way, I have [written a response to his Bible study.](#)*)

## **Additional Study:**

Studying the subject of jewelry can be hard since different words were used (ornaments, ornamentation, pearls, etc.). If you would like to do your own study into the subject then here are a couple of links that I hope will be helpful!

- [ISBE](#) – This is a link to the ISBE (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia) article on "Ornament."
- [Smith's Bible Dictionary](#) – A link to the "Ornaments, personal" article in Smith's Bible Dictionary.
- [NASB word search](#) – A link to the results of a search for the word "ornaments" in the NASB (New American Standard Bible).