

CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF 1 PETER 3:3-4 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN OKE- ODE, KWARA CONFERENCE

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Abstract

This study examines the contextual interpretation of 1 Peter 3:3-4 and its specific impact on the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in Oke-Ode, Kwara Conference, Nigeria. The passage, which contrasts outward adornment (elaborate hair, gold, fine apparel) with the “incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit,” forms the foundation of the SDA Church's traditional stance on dress and personal appearance. While the denomination advocates for simplicity globally, the application of this text in the unique Nigerian socio-cultural context often leads to tension. Employing a mixed-methods approach combining historical-grammatical exegesis with a localized descriptive survey of the Oke-Ode congregation, this research first establishes the probable first-century meaning of Peter's counsel (stressing priority of character over prohibition of all adornment). The study then analyzes how local church leaders and members in Oke-Ode interpret and enforce this teaching, navigating the conflict between SDA theological heritage and local cultural aesthetics, where dress and certain non-prohibited jewelry may hold significant social value. The findings reveal that a highly literal and legalistic interpretation of the text creates notable challenges, including internal dissension between generations, the perception of cultural irrelevance among non-members, and potential barriers to evangelism. The paper concludes that a principle-driven, contextually informed interpretation, focusing on the development of the “hidden person of the heart” as the primary form of Christian witness, is essential for promoting church unity and maximizing missionaries effectiveness within the Oke-Ode community. Recommendations are provided for leadership to harmonize biblical authority, denominational standards, and cultural sensitivity.

Keywords: 1 Peter 3:3-4, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Adornment, Contextual Interpretation, Kwara Conference, Oke-Ode, Mission, Dress, Legalism, Cultural Relevance.

Introduction

Christian adornment remains a perennial theological debate balancing biblical mandate, denominational tradition, and local custom. For believers, bodily appearance—including dress, cosmetics, and jewelry—is viewed as a reflection of spiritual commitment, drawing focus to New Testament texts on modesty. Specifically, 1 Peter 3:3-4, which counsels that adornment should not be "merely outward" but rather "the hidden person of the heart," serves as a cornerstone for these principles. The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church has historically applied this and related texts (e.g., 1 Timothy 2:9-10) conservatively, promoting simplicity and discouraging jewelry. However, translating this global standard into Nigeria presents distinct challenges. In Oke-Ode (Kwara Conference), strict adherence to this directive conflicts with traditional Yoruba aesthetics, changing social norms, and regional evangelistic pressures. This study offers a contextual analysis of 1 Peter 3:3-4, assessing how its localized interpretation shapes the spiritual life and institutional dynamics of the Oke-Ode SDA congregation.

The SDA Church, in its bid to maintain fidelity to scripture and its heritage, faces tension between global denominational policy regarding dress and adornment and the need for contextual relevance in its local congregations. Karen H. Jobes argues that whether 1 Peter 3:3 is total prohibition of external adornment or a comparative statement (stressing the priority of internal character over outward show). This ambiguity leads to varying levels of stringency in local church enforcement. The conservative SDA stance on dress and jewelry often clashes with the cultural norms of many Nigerian communities, where certain items of adornment (like simple gold rings) may hold social or marital significance, or where elaborate dress is considered a sign of respect. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the interpretation and subsequent enforcement of 1 Peter 3:3-4 in the Oke-Ode SDA Church may be contributing to issues such as: Members leaving the church due to perceived legalism or cultural insensitivity. Creating a cultural barrier that hinders effective outreach to the surrounding community. Dividing the congregation between those who advocate for strict, traditional standards and those who seek a more culturally adaptive interpretation.

Therefore, the core problem is that the failure to establish a contextually sensitive and theologically sound interpretation of 1 Peter 3:3-4 is potentially undermining the unity and mission effectiveness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Oke-Ode, Kwara Conference. The study want to Establish the most probable meaning and intention of 1 Peter 3:3-4 within its original first-century Greco-Roman context, considering the use of the Greek words for "adornment" and "imperishable beauty". To systematically survey and analyze the current interpretive practices and standards of personal adornment upheld by the church leaders and members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Oke-Ode, Kwara Conference.

To assess the specific spiritual, social, and evangelistic consequences of the prevailing interpretation of 1Peter 3:3-4 on the local church life and its relationship with the wider Oke-Ode community. The ultimate goal is to provide evidence-based recommendations to the Kwara Conference leadership for developing a principle-driven and culturally-informed approach to Christian adornment that safeguards biblical truth while maximizing the church's missioners effectiveness in the local context.

Dress and Ornaments in the Early Church

Christianity arose during the golden age of the Roman Empire. In 31 B. C. Emperor Augustus unified the empire by defeating his eastern competitors Anthony and Cleopatra and ushered in a period of unprecedented peace and prosperity. The wealth accumulated from the booty of wars gave rise to a new middle class that displayed its wealth through luxurious attire and ornaments. The ancient Roman virtue of modesty had disintegrated under the ravishment of imported Eastern luxury, and the emperors themselves led in the procession of debauchery. The extravagant luxury of the time was condemned by Roman moralists such as Cato, Seneca, Quintillian, Epictetus, and Lucius Valerius. For example, the famous Roman orator Quintillian commented on the extravagant fashion of the time, saying: "A tasteful and magnificent dress lends added dignity to the wearer: but effeminate and luxurious apparel fails to adorn the body, and only reveals the sordidness of the mind."

Adorning the body was a laborious and expensive process. A wealthy matron possessed several slaves trained as hairdressers who would work on her with heated steel pincers and tongs. Hair was dressed in different ways with hair bands and pins and braided with gold and gems. Wigs were worn, especially blond. The favourite colour for clothes was purple, which was extremely expensive. "Diamonds, emeralds, topazes, opals and sardonyx were favourite stones. Pearls were loved most of all. Julius Caesar bought for Servilia a pearl which cost him £21,250 (about \$80,000). Earrings were made of pearls, and Seneca spoke of women with two or three fortunes in their ears. Slippers were encrusted with them; Nero even had a room whose walls were covered with them. Pliny saw Lollia Paulina, wife of Caligula, wearing a dress so covered with pearls and emeralds that it had cost £450,000 (about \$1,600,000)."

Silk was regarded as the most potent weapon of seduction, because it was made into a fine, transparent, clinging material that could arouse interest at a time when low neck line did not exist. The effect of silk clothes may be judged by Seneca's outraged reaction: "There I see silken cloths, if they can be called cloths, which protect neither a woman's body nor her modesty, and in which she cannot truthfully declare that she is not naked. These are bought for huge sums of money . . . so that our women may show as much of themselves to the world at large as they show to their lovers in the bedroom."

Christians: Similar and yet different it was in this world of luxury and moral decadence that the earliest Christians were called to live and share their faith. They were called to show the purity and simplicity of their Christian faith by being similar and yet different from the rest of the society. They were similar because they dressed, spoke, and lived like ordinary people. Yet they were different because they dressed with modesty and simplicity. Tertullian (160-225), an influential church leader who is known as the father of Latin Christianity, responded to the charge that Christians were antisocial (misanthropic): “We sojourn with you in this world, abjuring neither forum, nor shambles, nor bath, nor booth, nor workshop, nor inn, nor weekly market, nor any other place of commerce. We sail with you, and fight with you and till the ground with you; and in like manner we unite with you in your trafficking—even in the various arts we make public property of our works for your benefit.” Yet, as Tertullian himself explained at great length in his numerous moral treatises, Christians were different because of their allegiance to Christ. They were called to live in this world without becoming part of its immoral practices. This meant, for example, that Christians practiced a dress code of modesty and simplicity, as enjoined by Peter and Paul. The two apostles urged Christians not to conform to the worldly fashions of their day by embellishing themselves “with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire,” but to show their separation from the world by adorning “themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel . . . as befits women who profess religion” (1 Tim 2:9-10; 1 Pet 3:1-6).

The New Testament dress code of modesty and simplicity taught by the apostles was enforced by church leaders in early Christianity. For example, in 202 Tertullian wrote a treatise *On the Apparel of Women* in which he urges women to wear nice, becoming dresses and giving attention to their hair and skin. But, he condemned seductive clothes and ornaments designed to attract attention. Similar denunciations of extravagant dress and ornaments are found in the writings of Clement of Alexandria (150-215), a contemporary of Tertullian who headed the catechetical (baptismal) school of Alexandria from 190 to 202. In his treatise Clement went into great detail to describe the luxurious clothes, the sandals with golden ornaments, the elaborate hair styles, and the multitude of ornaments worn by women. He lists the following array of female ornaments: “Snoods, fillets, natron, and steel; pumicestone, band, back-band, back-veil, paint, necklaces, paint for the eyes . . . Ear pendants, jewelry, earrings; mallow-coloured cluster-shaped anklets; buckles, clasps, necklets, fetters, seals, chains, rings, powders, bosses, bands, olisbi, Sardinian stones, fans, helicters.”

Clement wondered “how those who bear such a burden are not worried to death. O foolish trouble! O silly craze for display! To these the Spirit prophesies by Zephaniah: ‘And their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s anger.’ But for those women who have been trained under Christ, it is suitable to adorn themselves not with gold, but with the Word, through whom alone the gold comes to light.”

According to Clement, Christians should not say, “I possess, and possess in abundance: why then should I not enjoy?” but rather they should say, “I have: why should I not give to those who need?” Continuing, he expounded on the principle of responsible stewardship: “It is monstrous for one to live in luxury, while many are in want. How much more glorious is to do good to many, than to live sumptuously! How much wiser to spend the money on human beings, than on jewels and gold! How much more useful to acquire decorous friends, than lifeless ornaments!” Similar exhortations are found in the writings of Cyprian (died 258), who served as church leader in Carthage, North Africa. In his small treatise *On the Dress of Virgins*, he urged women to be modest and becoming in their appearance. He maintained that an immodest woman cannot rightfully claim to belong to Christ. “Having put on silk and purple, they cannot put on Christ; adorned with gold, and pearls, and necklaces, they have lost the ornaments of the heart and spirit.”

In a fatherly fashion Cyprian appealed to women saying: “Let your countenance remain in you incorrupt, your neck unadorned, your figure simple; let not wounds be made in your ears, not let the precious chain of bracelets and necklaces circle your arms or your neck; let your feet be free from golden bands, your hair stained with no dye, your eyes worthy of beholding God.” These exhortations reveal that some Christians in the second and third centuries were influenced by the extravagant and immodest fashion of their time, in spite of the constant appeals of their church leaders to be modest and sober in their appearance. The same is true in our own time.

Many Christians follow more closely the dictates of immodest fashion than the Biblical directives of modesty, decency and sobriety. The conformity of some Christians to the worldly fashion of their time should not obscure the fact that most Christians had the courage to reject it, dressing instead according to the Biblical principles of modesty and decency. The pagans noticed the modest way in which Christians clothed themselves. In fact, we read in *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* that Perpetua and other newly baptized Christian women were forced to wear pagan clothes and ornaments prior to their execution in the arena of Carthage, North Africa on March 7, 203. Presumably by this act the pagans wanted to make a mockery of Christian modesty.

The Root of Seventh-day Adventist Church

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has its roots in the Millerite movement of the 19th century. William Miller, a Baptist preacher, predicted that Jesus Christ would return on October 22, 1844. Although the prediction was incorrect, the movement laid the groundwork for the development of the Adventist Church. The failure of Miller's prediction, known as the Great Disappointment, led to a period of re-evaluation and re-organization. A small group of Millerites, including Ellen G. White and her husband James, continued to study the Bible and pray, seeking guidance on their next steps. In 1846, Ellen G. White began to experience visions, which she believed were messages from God. These visions helped shape the theology and practices of the emerging Adventist Church. The church's name, "Seventh-day Adventist," reflects its emphasis on the seventh-day Sabbath and the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

The following are among the founders of this Church, 1. Ellen G. White (1827-1915): A prolific author, speaker, and visionary who played a crucial role in shaping Adventist theology and practices. 2. James White (1821-1881): Ellen's husband and a key leader in the early Adventist movement. 3. Joseph Bates (1792-1872): former sea captain who became a prominent Adventist leader and helped establish the church's organization. Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a global organization with over 21 million members in more than 200 countries. The church operates hospitals, schools, and humanitarian organizations, and is known for its emphasis on healthy living, education, and community service.

The Advent of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nigeria

Most Nigerian Adventists of the first generation will remember that Elder Babcock reached Erunmu/Lalupon, Ibadan in 1914. This is what has been recorded in some of the available documents. However, the writer's interview with Pastor D. B. Alabi, the oldest of the ordained pastors in 1985, put David Caldwell Babcock's arrival at Erunmu/Lalupon, Ibadan in about April or May, 1914. Elder Babcock had earlier landed in Lagos, the coastal port and capital city of Nigeria. He went northward by train to reach Lalupon Railway Station. But Erunmu became the mission site, sixteen miles northeast of Ibadan, formerly capital city of the Old Western Region (now capital of Oyo state), the largest city in West Africa and the largest native city in Africa.

Elder DC Babcock erected a house and dug a well which has been called "Babcock's Well" till this day. Samuel Oyeniyi one of the sons of Chief Oyelese, the Baale of Erunmu and Jacob Alao, became interpreters and Teachers for the missionaries. Before the end of 1914, three schools were in operation in the area and seven converts were reported. In 1915, Elder Babcock went farther inland and founded another station at a place called Shao (Sao). At that time, the work had started to grow gradually at Erunmu area. The new station was also a village seven miles northwest of Ilorin, an important won in Yoruba land. Babcock got settled at this site.

He made a straight and broad road between the village and Ilorin city. He made strong bridges across the rivers without which transportation would have been difficult. While Elder Babcock was settling down at Sao, invitation came to him from Ipoti-Ekiti, which is 120 kilometres Southeast of Ilorin and about 352 kilometres North-East of Lagos. The people asked him to speak to them on the Seventh Day Sabbath. He did so and gave references from the Bible to support his statements. Consequently over 150 CMS members broke away and accepted the Sabbath messages. This was how a third Adventist Mission was founded.

Elder Babcock had started at Sao a school which became a kind of boarding central school in 1916 for the three stations: Erunmu, Sao and Ipoti-Ekiti from which students were recruited. The main subjects that were taught in the school included reading, writing, arithmetic and Bible which was the most important of the subjects; besides these the students were taught trades like brick-making and laying, carpentry, furniture making, agriculture and gardening. At Ipoti-Ekiti the memberships increased so rapidly that the church members soon called Elder Babcock from Sao to come down and help them erect a place of worship for the increasing church members, Elder Babcock though ill, left Sao in 1917 for Ipoti-Ekiti to help in laying a foundation for a new church building. On reaching Ipoti and spending only two weeks, contrary to his expectation, his illness became so worse that the church members had to choose some strong men who carried him in a hammock to Osogbo where a railway line with a station had been built. In a miraculous way his wife and children who were coming from Sao met him being carried by Ipoti S.D.A church members along the same foot paths which Mrs Babcock and his children had taken to look for him.

The journey took two days through the bush foot path from Ipoti to Osogbo which also had been linked with Lagos on the coast by a railway line. Babcock with his wife and children never went back to Sao for they were put on a train at Oshogbo railway station for Lagos where they boarded a ship for England. It was William Mc Clement from Ireland who took charge of the church in Nigeria by 1920. In the first few years his activity was mainly in the south-west of the country. It was Jesse Clifford and his wife, both from England that came to begin Adventist work in South-eastern Nigeria in 1923. They have served for few years in Sierra Leone and Ghana and in reaching Nigeria, they settled in Aba which since became the S.D.A headquarters for Eastern Nigeria, "the most fruitful West Africa field"

Conclusively, in year 1923, William G. Till of England opened a station in Otun-Ekiti, 100 kilometres (63 miles) South of Sao and about nineteen kilometres (12 miles) north of Ipoti-Ekiti. This station became the centre of a prosperous work in the Ekiti area. After Otun was well established, the headquarters was transferred from Sao in 1927 to Ibadan where SDA was founded four years earlier.

The Adventists arrived Northern Nigeria in 1930 but finally established at Jengre in 1932. The missionaries faced turbulent challenges from the British colonial administration the Muslims and other Christian missionaries. The early Adventist missionaries effectively utilized the medical and educational imperatives.

The History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Oke-Ode

According to the local history of the people, Oke-Ode town was a big commercial trading centre for people from Osun, Ekiti and Ondo States and many towns far and near according to the indigenes, for example, many who were of Edu Local Government Origin, Lafiagi in particular had their homes and businesses at Oke-Ode. This is the town in Kwara State that brought up Elisha Romanus Awoniyi, one of the great apostles of Jesus Christ in this generation. Without considering the history and the great impacts Elisha Romanus Awoniyi made, the history of Seventh-day Adventist Church, Oke-Ode will never be completed.

Romanus Awoniyi, was born into the family of Anisingin of Ile-Inaru compound towards the end of the twentieth century. His father, Anisingin was a tradition worshipper (an Ifa priest) who travelled around neighbouring communities for his business. In one of his trips, he visited Ila Orangun, Osun state, Nigeria, with Elisha Romanus, his eldest son, where Elisha saw for the first time, primary school pupils in their uniforms. According to Joel Awoniyi, Romanus was surprised to see pupils reading from books. He was inspired and made up his mind to follow their steps.

As soon as he returned back to Oke-Ode he discussed with his mates who could teach him how to read and write. He was directed one Ijesha man, Akomolafe, a merchant in the community. Interestingly, both met and had a fruitful deliberation. It was said that from 1922-1923, Akomolafe began with Romanus and a few others a Weekly lesson in "A.B.D" a Yoruba text book for beginners. It is said that, Romanus enrolled at a nearby available elementary school, and that was Sudan Interior Mission (S.I.M) Primary school, Agunjin, about seven miles from Oke-Ode. There he got Baptist, in 1928 and bought his first Bible. Romanus brought the Bible to Oke-Ode, thus, became the first indigene to possess a Bible. It was also said that, Elisha invited S.I.M Missionaries to come and establish their church at Oke-Ode.

However, there was no Senior Primary School at S.I.M School Agunjin, therefore, Elisha Awoniyi in 1932 left Oke-Ode in Pursuant of his educational career. He however, spent some time at Fiditi, but he did not meet his objectives there. Elisha needed to engage in manual labour where he could get money to sponsor himself in school. Undauntedly, he relocated to Ibadan where he met one of his former schoolmates who introduced him to a Sabbath tract by Seventh-day Adventist Church. Having read it, he decided to locate the church. He met one of the Pastors at the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Oke-Bola, Ibadan, who studied the Bible with him, and having being impressed by the Holy Spirit of the truth of the Sabbath, he became a member of the church.

The next thing that was on his mind was how to complete his primary school education. He was introduced to available S.D.A. Primary School at Oke-Bola, and the opportunity of work study programme. He was overwhelmed with the Adventist system of education, where one could go to school and be able to earn wages to sponsor himself in school, indeed, his dream came through as he enrolled in the S.D.A. Senior Primary School.

It was said that while at S.D.A. School, Oke-Bola, Romanus Awoniyi planted several Acacia trees in the frontal part of the Mission compound that was later referred to, as Romanus Forest. At the completion of his studies, he was employed by the church and posted to Ipoti-Ekiti as a teacher and a pastor. After working in the field for a while he was admitted to the Seventh-day Adventist teacher training college, Oke-Bola Ibadan for the next three years. Perhaps, God works in mysterious ways, and we can hardly understand Him. The church administrative repost Romanus Awoniyi back to Ipoti-Ekiti, then, as the Headmaster in charge of the school and as well as the church Pastor. He successfully worked with some of his teachers and the S.D.A Primary School; Ipoti-Ekiti became a viable and one of the best in the community. Standards were maintained and moral virtues inculcated into the mind of pupils. The foundation was solidly laid on the Rock of Ages. According to Joel Awoniyi, by the end of the year 1944, Romanus Awoniyi got married to his beautiful and ever cheerful wife former Miss Serah Taiwo after the marriage, they decided to go back to Oke-Ode to establish a Primary School in his own town.

Perhaps it should be mentioned here that before Awoniyi came back to Oke-Ode from Ipoti in 1945, he had earlier in 1937 studied the Bible with his brothers and some people at Oke-Ode. It was said that, initially, they had a lot of arguments as they studied Bible from Genesis to Revelation about the Lord's Seventh-day Sabbath. According to information gathered, Awoniyi encountered a lot of tribulations from the Sudan Interior Mission now ECWA Church. He was accused of introducing a strange doctrine; the Seventh-Day Sabbath differs from what he, firstly taught them. The non-Christian community leaders also opposed the establishment of Seventh-day Adventist Church, because according to them, that step will lead to rivalry and competition. Despite strong opposition, he remained undeterred and established the first Sabbath School in 1937, which was initially attended by five members of the Awoniyi family. With God's help, they acquired a piece of land and erected a mud church building. Subsequently, other families joined the Branch Sabbath School, including the Omotunde family, the Onibiyo family, the Taiwo family, the Ejide family, the Ojulari family, the Jejelola family, the Alade family, and the Omotosho family.

However, while at Ipoti as a teacher and Pastor, Awoniyi kept thinking of his own town Oke-Ode and the light of the three angels Messages. He had a burden for his own people, he wanted them to accept Lord Jesus as their Saviour and accept the truth of the Sabbath.

The above reason made Awoniyi to plead with the Seventh-day Adventist Mission to transfer him to his home town Oke-Ode, immediately, after his wedding. His request was granted and he was sent to Oke-Ode to start school and take care of the church. He was able to gather a few boys and a school was opened. In 1945, He laboured hard but the result was not commensurable to the efforts put in by Elisha.

The S.I.M. Church members forbade any of their wards and their children from the S.D.A Primary School. Sad enough, the non-Christian community leaders also opposed the establishment of the school as they previously opposed the establishment of S.D.A Church eight years earlier. At that point in time, the Seventh-day Adventist church administration, at Oke-Bola, Ibadan, empathised with Awoniyi and also felt the frustration of Awoniyi, who as a trained teacher all to be in charge of a flourishing school, decided to relocate him to Owo Bale in Ibadan Area, as a teacher and Pastor. He made his impact felt and known by series of community development projects. It was said that through communal efforts led by him, the construction of the present road from Owo Bale to Erunmu took place.

Later, Romanus was transferred to the Seventh-day Adventist Nursing School, Ile-Ife, where he taught history and Bible knowledge for a number of years. He was very effective Chaplain who introduced many of his students to the Lord Jesus. He was a father to many of them. Until his sudden transfer to Sao, the home of the Seventh-day Adventist Premier Church, in Kwara State. Perhaps, it should be said that before Pastor E.R. Awoniyi was posted to Sao, there had been a lacuna in the services of Pastors, generally, as a whole, in Kwara State. Churches were left for several years without the services of the Pastors, Teachers and Evangelists. The spiritual nourishment was at low ebb. For instance, the nearest ordained minister to Sao for many years was Pastor J.D. Owolabi, stationed at Osi, Kwara State about sixty-seven miles away from Sao. J.D. Owolabi was the school manager of the Seventh-day Adventist Primary Schools, in Ilorin province who was factually in charge of Osi, Rore, Omu-Aran and Sao schools.

At this juncture, it is good to go down memory lanes and discover what led to the misfortune that befell the Adventist Churches in Kwara State. When Elder David C. Babcock arrived at Ilorin In 1915, his Royal Highness, Sheu-Bawa, the 7th Emir of Ilorin was on the throne who reigned from 1915-1919. During the period, David C. Babcock lived at Sao, and, Sao became the light bearer and headquarters of Seventh-day Adventist Mission in Nigeria. It was at Sao that the District Officer (D.O.) for Ilorin pleaded with David Babcock to come for the supervision of the suspended bridge across the Asa River in Ilorin Township. The project was successfully executed and became functional known today as Amilegbe Bridge.

He further expressed, “David Babcock got settled at site, Sao, he made a straight and broad road between the village and Ilorin. He made a strong bridge across a big river to make transport easy. He also made a strong swinging bridge across a big river which flowed through Ilorin “Amilegbe Bridge.”

Exegetical Analysis of 1 Peter 3:3–4

Translating verse 3 is complicated by two factors. The first is that, after speaking directly to wives in the second person (ὁμῶν), Peter now continues in the third person (ὃν). The other feature to note is that everything between the article and the noun (ὁ...κόσμος) is again in the attributive position. Literally translated, Peter would be saying something like: “Of whom let not their adornment be (the adornment) of braiding of hair and putting around of gold and donning of (fashionable) clothes.” To be preferred is a rendering that for continuity retains the previous second person, e.g., the NIV’s “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.” Peter warns against the natural inclination to become engrossed in personal appearance and attire. It is entirely possible, however, that the problem does not lie completely with the wife’s vanity. It is just as possible that she is trying to please her husband who, especially if he is not a believer, might well expect of her the ostentation that characterizes so much of what the world does. Peter is not objecting to any specific fashions or styles, nor is he condemning a wife to perpetual dowdiness. The point is rather one of attitude. She is not to make her appeal on outward and external considerations. Her adornment is not to be ἐξωθεν, but rather ὁ κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος, “the hidden person of the heart.”

Again, continuing in the second person is preferable: “Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.” A wife’s true adornment lies not in what she does to make herself attractive, but in a sense, what she doesn’t do. Peter says that, ideally, she is to distinguish herself with a “gentle and quiet spirit.” Notice that we have returned to what is essentially a definition of submission to her husband. The world may not be much impressed with a “gentle and quiet spirit,” but that is of no consequence, for it is ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ πολυτελής, “very precious in the sight of God.” But Peter adds yet a third inducement to wives. Submission may gain her husband for Christianity. It is furthermore very pleasing to God. This would yield the sense ‘let not external adornment ... be yours, but let the unseen person of the heart ... be yours.’ Guzik translates this as “Do not let your adornment be merely outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God”. The beauty of a godly wife must not be centred on outward appearance but that which is honourable and morally upright. Dubis has it that the Greek text of verses 3–4, would thus be

ὧν ἔστω (κόσμος) οὐχ ὁ ἑξωθεν ἐμπλοκῆς τριχῶν καὶ περιθέσεως χρυσίων ἢ ἐνδύσεως ἱματίων κόσμος ἀλλ' (ὧν ἔστω κόσμος) ὁ κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ τοῦ πραέως καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος. Which when translated would be: Let not the external adornment that consists in hairstyles, jewellery, and clothes be that which beauties' you, but let the unseen person of the heart be that which beauties' you.

The word κόσμος, is derived from cosmetics, and is used in its original sense of an orderly arrangement, referring to adornment or decoration. It points to the world as orderly system (1 John 2:15-17). Peter did not prohibit all adornment for godly women. But for them outward adornment is always in moderation, and her emphasis should always be on inward adornment. In antiquity women often arranged and dyed their hair. They also wore wigs, especially blonde wigs made with hair imported from Germany. Peter had this in mind when he addressed the women on adornment that is merely outward. He did not prevent a woman fixing her hair, or wearing jewelry, any more than he forbade her wearing apparel rather, to let it be the hidden person of τῆς καρδίας (the heart). “Though desire to be beautiful and attractive is manifestly a commendable one, outward beauty, however much desirable, is secondary to beauty of character”. Real beauty comes from the hidden person of the heart. It is not something you wear or primp before a mirror to possess. It is something you are. The word ἔστω (let it not be) in this verse is a command in keeping with the present aspect, which portrays an internal perspective. The application this thought connotes the fact that Peter encourages the wives not to concentrate on outward beauty.

The inner beauty of a godly woman is incorruptible and does not decay or get worse with age. Instead, incorruptible beauty only gets better with age, and is therefore of much greater value than the beauty that comes from the hair, jewelry, or clothing. When women submit to their husbands and do not put trust in their outward adornment, they are like the holy women of former times who trusted in God. Through that they will be able to impressively demonstrate their faith in God. ἀλλ' ὁ κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος ἐν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ τοῦ πραέως καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ πολυτελής. πολυτελής.

The word πολυτελής is relevant to being a great value or worth. It occurs three times in the NT and two of them pointed to outward adornments, such as ointment and garments (Mk 14:3; 1 Tm 2:9). Nevertheless, Peter described the character of true beauty as a gentle and quiet spirit. These character traits are not promoted for women by our culture; yet they are very precious in the sight of God. He employs the word 'πολυτελής' to completely explain the inward life of a godly wife. Consequently, Peter persuades them to know that God himself considers their inward beautification at high value and as an irresistible beauty.

Contextual Interpretation in Oke-Ode, Kwara Conference

Paul's teaching on the adorning of Christian women is largely repeated by Peter, although in a different context. While the context of Paul's teaching on Christian adornment is the conduct of women in the church, the context of Peter's teaching is the conduct of women in the home. The striking similarity between the two teachings goes to show that the principles of modesty and decency in outward appearance apply equally to the home and to the church. Peter offered wives a twofold admonition to help them maintain a happy relationship with their husbands, and win them to Christ if they are unbelievers.

The first admonition is to have a submissive attitude toward their husbands by maintaining pure and respectful behaviour. "Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behaviour of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behaviour" (1 Pet 3:1-2). Like Paul (1 Corinthians 7:13-16), Peter does not advise the wife who became brave enough to become a Christian, to leave the husband, but to win him by a submissive attitude. She is to manifest submission not by preaching, nagging, or arguing for equal rights, but by the silent testimony of the loveliness of her life. In this way she can break down the barrier of prejudice and hostility and win her husband to Christ. The notion of a wife's submission to her husband is unpopular today, especially Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who view it as equivalent to inferiority. But the submission enjoined is of function, not of moral or physical status. Functional submission does not mean inferiority.

Jesus was equal with God in nature (ontologically), yet functionally He submitted himself by becoming a servant. The submission of the wife to the husband is not out of fear or inferiority, but from perfect love. She does it because she loves Christ, she loves her husband, and she gladly accepts her role and the role of her husband as the head of her home (Colossians 3:18; Ephesians 5:22-23). The passage suggests that some husbands, particularly those hostile to the Christian faith ("who do not obey the word"), may be difficult to please. In such circumstances the wife's faith and devotion to Christ will help her to be submissive to her husband. Since her husband does not accept the Word (the Gospel) she witnesses to him without a word, that is, without preaching at him. She lives the Word before her husband by her pure and respectful behaviour.

Peter's second admonition is for wives to win their husbands to Christ not through outward luxurious ornaments, but through the inner adorning of a gentle and quiet spirit. "Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and the wearing of fine clothing, but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious" (1 Peter 3:3-4). In this passage Peter followed the pattern of Paul in 1 Timothy 2:9-10, contrasting the outward adorning of the body by worldly women with the inward adorning of the heart by Christian women.

The negative outward adorning of worldly women consists of “braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and the wearing of fine clothing.” This list corresponds essentially to that given by Paul, which we have already examined. Thus it will suffice to note that both of the apostles recognize that eye-catching hair styles, glittering ornaments, and costly dresses are not appropriate for Christian women.

The positive inward adorning of the Christian woman consists of the graces of the heart, the gentle and quiet spirit which is precious in God's sight. This is the adorning of a calm temper, a contented mind, and a heart free from the pride, vanity, and agitation of those who seek recognition through external adorning. This is the adorning that will commend a woman to God, to her husband, and to others. This is the adorning which is not lipstick-deep, nor skin-deep, but soul-deep. Peter is not implying that a Christian wife should ignore her outward appearance and concentrate on the inner beautification of her soul. No wife can hope to secure the permanent affection of her husband if she is not attentive to her personal appearance and neat in her habits. But what a man appreciates most in his wife are the ornaments of her heart: her gentle words, her patient spirit, her calmness in trouble, her pure affection.

Thus, a woman who wishes to win the permanent affection of her husband should seek to have not only a neat outward appearance but also a gentle, calm, and benevolent inward disposition. Peter concludes his admonition by setting before Christian wives the worthy example of the outstanding wives of Old Testament times who, like Abraham's wife Sarah, cultivated the inner adorning of the heart and “were submissive to their husbands” (1 Peter 3:5). Sarah showed her deference to Abraham by “calling him lord” (1 Peter 3:6). It is noteworthy that both Peter and Paul spoke about the adorning of Christian women in the context of a submissive attitude. Peter appealed to a “submissive” attitude immediately before and after mentioning the adorning of Christian wives, while Paul did so right after discussing the adorning of Christian women (1 Timothy 2:11). This suggests that both apostles recognized that outward adorning is determined by the inner attitude of the heart. A submissive, humble attitude will be reflected in modest, becoming, and sober apparel, while an insubordinate, proud attitude will be manifested in an immodest, extravagant, seductive appearance.

Theological Evaluation and Pastoral Implications

The New Testament teaches how Christians should dress by means of indirect allegories and direct admonitions. Textual analysis reveals a stark contrast between the attire of the two symbolic women in the Book of Revelation, namely the Great Harlot and the Bride of Christ. (Rev. 17:4) and the Bride of Christ (Rev. 19:7–8). The impure woman is dressed extravagantly and adorned with costly ornaments, simply because such attire fittingly represents her internal pride and seductive schemes. By contrast, the pure woman is dressed with simplicity and modesty, without outward ornaments, simply because such apparel fittingly represents her internal humility and purity.

As Christians, we follow the example of Christ's bride, which is the church to which we belong, by showing our inner purity and godliness through the simplicity and modesty of our outward appearance. Directly, we have found that both Paul and Peter contrast the appropriate adorning of Christian women with the inappropriate ornaments of worldly women (1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3-4). Both apostles recognize that the outward glittering ornaments of the body are inconsistent with the inward ornaments of the heart, the quiet spirit and benevolent deeds. A close analysis of the terms used by Paul has revealed three important principles: (1) Christian should dress in a modest, becoming way, avoiding extremes. (2) Christians should dress in a decent, dignified way, showing respect for God, themselves, and others. (3) Christians should dress soberly, restraining any desire to exhibit themselves by wearing eye-catching clothes, cosmetics, or jewelry. The outward appearance is a constant silent witness of our Christian identity. It tells the world that we live to glorify God and not ourselves.

Impact of 1 Peter 3:3–4 on the SDA Church in Oke-Ode

1 Peter 3:3–4 (ESV) — 3 Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. Peter moves from the outward conduct to the inward character, urging wives to prioritize inner beauty over external adornment. In a world obsessed with appearances, this message is counter-cultural. Peter is not condemning outward beauty or adornment, but he is emphasizing that true beauty, in God's eyes, comes from within. The imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit is precious to God. This inner beauty reflects a heart transformed by Christ, a heart that radiates peace, humility, and strength.

Looking at this his principle it involves a shift in focus from the external to the internal. It calls for a commitment to spiritual growth and character development. Wives are encouraged to invest time in prayer, scripture reading, and other spiritual disciplines that cultivate a gentle and quiet spirit. This doesn't mean suppressing one's personality or voice but developing a heart that is at peace with God and others. It's about letting the light of Christ shine through one's character, which in turn enhances all other aspects of life, including outward beauty. Consider a woman who is constantly bombarded by societal pressures to maintain a certain appearance. Instead of succumbing to these pressures, she focuses on cultivating a heart of kindness and humility. Her friends notice the peace and joy that emanate from her, and they begin to see the value of inner beauty over external appearance. The verse reinforces teachings on modesty and humility in personal conduct.

In many Nigerian SDA congregations—including rural and semi-urban ones like Oke-Ode—members often emphasize respectful behaviour, modest dress, and inward spirituality as markers of Christian witness. Passages like 1 Peter 3:3–4 frequently shape Women's Ministries and family discipleship programmes. They are often used (sensitively) to encourage inner spiritual growth and mutual respect within families, rather than focusing merely on outward appearance. In many Yoruba-speaking and Nigerian contexts, where social identity and community life interact with cultural norms of dress and beauty, this scripture can serve as a biblical counter-balance against excessive emphasis on outward fashion, reminding members to prioritize spiritual maturity and service.

In practice, this text may influence church culture by strengthening communal expectations around loving conduct, humility, and self-control. It can help foster a church environment where character and community encouragement matter more than status or outward display. In Adventist theology, Scripture is the authority for Christian living, and the writings of Ellen G. White are used to support and guide that interpretation. While 1 Peter 3:3–4 is not a foundational doctrine, its influence is felt in how members are taught to conduct themselves as representatives of Christ—valuing inner transformation above appearance.

Conclusion

The contextual interpretation of 1 Peter 3:3–4 within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Oke-Ode reveals that the passage is not merely a directive about outward appearance, but, in line with broader Adventist theology, a divine call to prioritize inner spiritual transformation over external adornment. This interpretation aligns with the Adventist emphasis on holistic Christian character—where modesty, humility, and the “gentle and quiet spirit” are understood not as cultural restrictions but as expressions of Christlike character lived out in everyday life.

In the Kwara Conference context, particularly in Oke-Ode, this passage has influenced personal conduct, corporate worship norms, and discipleship processes. Members increasingly view Christian witness as rooted in inner beauty and moral integrity, shaping communal expectations around respectful conduct, modest attire, and authentic spiritual life. While cultural values around beauty and dress remain influential, Adventist teaching rooted in 1 Peter 3:3–4 has helped shift attention from external conformity to heart transformation as the essence of Christian identity. Enhanced focus on inner spirituality in church teachings, small groups, and family devotion. Reinforcement of modesty and humility as lived expressions of faith rather than rigid rules. Greater awareness of Christian witness in the broader community, where character and service speak louder than appearance.

Overall, the passage's contextual interpretation in Oke-Ode reflects a balanced integration of biblical teaching with local cultural realities, strengthening the church's witness and discipleship emphasis within the Kwara Conference.

To deepen the positive impact of 1 Peter 3:3–4 in the SDA Church at Oke-Ode and throughout the Kwara Conference, the following recommendations are proposed: Go beyond dress codes to explore heart transformation, humility, and Christlike character. Include contextual Bible studies illustrating how inner beauty manifests in service, speech, relationships, and moral choices. Acknowledge local cultural expressions of beauty without compromising biblical principles. Help members discern between culturally shaped norms and spiritual priorities emphasized in Scripture. Address modesty, self-esteem, and Christian witness in everyday life. Promote role models of inner spiritual beauty.

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