

QUESTION:

Shalom beloved in Christ. My question comes from *Exodus 33:5*, where the LORD says to Moses:

"Now therefore, take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you." (NKJV)

What exactly did God mean when He said this?

ANSWER:

To understand this statement, it's important to read the full context in *Exodus 33:1-6*. Here's a brief overview:

Exodus 33:1-6 (NKJV) Summary:

God commanded Moses to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land, a land "flowing with milk and honey" (v.3). However, due to their rebellion specifically their worship of the golden calf in *Exodus 32*—God declared that **He would no longer go with them personally**, lest He destroy them on the way because of their stubbornness. Instead, He

would send an angel to go before them.

When the Israelites heard this, they mourned deeply and **removed their ornaments** their outward adornments. This was in obedience to God's command in *Exodus 33:5*, which said:

"You are a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you. Now therefore, take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you." (NKJV)

What Were These "Ornaments"?

The Hebrew word translated as **"ornaments"** (עֲדָיִם - *edyem*) refers broadly to **jewelry, decorative items, and symbols of status or pride**—such as:

- Earrings, necklaces, rings (*Genesis 35:4; Exodus 32:2-3*)
- Expensive garments

- Personal treasures

These were not only aesthetic accessories but also often **linked to cultural identity, status, and sometimes even idolatrous practices.**

In *Exodus 32:2-4*, these very ornaments were used to forge the **golden calf**, which became a symbol of Israel's disobedience and spiritual unfaithfulness:

"So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf..." (Exodus 32:3-4, NIV)

Thus, when God commanded them to remove their ornaments, it was a **symbolic act of repentance** a rejection of pride, vanity, and the very items that had been tied to their sin.

1. **Repentance Involves External and Internal Change:**

Removing their ornaments was an outward sign of an **inward sorrow and humility**. This reflects the biblical pattern of mourning and repentance:

"So it was, when they heard the words of the Law, that they tore their clothes." (2 Chronicles 34:19, NKJV)

"Put on sackcloth, you priests, and mourn... declare a holy fast." (Joel 1:13-14, NIV)

2. **God Tests the Heart Through Acts of Obedience:**

When God said, "that I may know what to do to you," He was **testing their sincerity**. It wasn't that God didn't know what was in their hearts rather, He wanted their obedience and brokenness to be manifest.

3. **God's Presence Requires Holiness:**

God had declared:

"I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way." (Exodus 33:3, NIV)
His presence is holy, and He cannot dwell among unrepentant sin.

What Can We Learn Today?

Like the Israelites, we too are called to **remove the ornaments of pride, sin, and spiritual compromise**. Today, this may not always be physical jewelry it could be anything we hold onto that distances us from God: ego, worldly identity, habits, or even religious idolatry.

This reminds us of the words of the Apostle James:

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."
(James 4:8, NKJV)

Just like the Israelites, we must prefer **falling into the hands of a merciful God** rather than trusting in human strength or religious formality.

This echoes the story of **King David** in *2 Samuel 24:12-14*, when he was given three options for punishment:

"Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man." (v.14, NKJV)

Though God's discipline may be painful, it is always for our restoration, not our destruction:

"The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death." (Psalm 118:18, NKJV)

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent." (Revelation 3:19, NIV)

Final Word:

Friend, there is no safer place than in the hands of God. He is just but also merciful. Don't cling to outward beauty, pride, or sin. Remove your "ornaments" and return to Him in humility.

Let His presence lead you not just His blessings, not just His angels. Choose **God Himself**.

Maranatha - Come, Lord Jesus.

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