

A Study Of Moral Issues: Immodest Apparel

Introduction. Christians are distinguished by the way they modestly clothe themselves. It is the way that they “walk worthy” (Ephesians 4:1), and walking worthy means avoiding many of the common moral issues that plague Christians.

Our times are clearly marked by an absence of modesty, and immodest apparel is a subject that has plagued God’s children. The temptation to “fit in” with the world, the lack of availability of modest clothing in stores, and sadly, in many churches, inadequate teaching on the topic and uncorrected situations of immodesty have all played a part in producing compromise.

Why do people dress immodestly? Maybe they are untaught, or maybe they want to draw attention to themselves. They may seek acceptance, or maybe they are careless and indifferent. But God cares how we dress; therefore, so should we. Within a few minutes, we can understand that immodesty matters in our choices of clothing.

I. Immodesty Matters Enough To Have Biblical Guidance

- A. There are two topics of which to be aware when addressing this subject.
 - 1. The danger of moral relativism.
 - a) What is modest to me might not be modest to you.
 - b) What is shameful to me might not be shameful to you.
 - 2. The danger of producing controversy.
 - a) Who is to determine specifically what is modest or shameful?
 - (1) Who can say for sure what professes godliness with clothing?
 - (2) Are there only gray areas or can a finer line be drawn?
 - b) Is there a more specific standard?
 - (1) Should we turn to the world (i.e., customs, fashions, styles, and time)?
 - (2) Should we let our individual consciences decide?
 - (3) Should we turn to the subjective reasoning of men?
- B. We should dig deeper and examine the whole counsel of God (Deuteronomy 4:2; Jeremiah 10:23; Acts 17:11; Romans 15:4; Revelation 22:18-19).

II. Immodesty Matters Enough For God To Leave Us Commands To Obey

- A. Peter’s instruction to wives directly and husbands indirectly tells us God cares (1 Peter 3:1-7).
 - 1. This passage gives us three attributes of a Christian’s conduct.
 - a) Chaste — pure from worldliness.
 - b) Meek — mildness of disposition and gentleness of spirit.
 - c) Quiet — tranquil and peaceful.
 - 2. Important lessons from this passage.
 - a) The phrase “putting on of apparel” speaks directly of our clothing choices.
 - (1) They must manifest holiness — “... in the old time the holy women ...”
 - (2) They must manifest a trust in God — “... who trusted in God ...”
 - b) Modesty begins in the spirit and manifests itself in appearance and conduct. Therefore, how you dress and act reflects your inner character.
- B. Paul’s instruction to Timothy tells us God cares (1 Timothy 2:9-10).

1. This passage clearly indicates that a woman's apparel, who is making a claim of godliness, must be:
 - a) Modest — well arranged and seemly (cp. 1 Timothy 3:2 — “good behavior,” KJV; “respectable,” ESV; “proper,” NASB).
 - b) Shamefastness — shrinks from transgressing the limits of womanly reserve and modesty, as well as from dishonor would justly attach thereto (cp. Hebrews 12:28 — “reverence,” KJV; “decency,” NIV).
 - c) Sobriety — soundness of mind and self-control (cp. Acts 26:25; “discreetly,” NASB; “good sense,” CSV).
 2. “With good works” distinguishes our conduct from our apparel in this text.
- C. Two key sins must be noted from these contexts.
1. Immodesty in an ostentatious way — too much of the wrong kind of apparel.
 2. Immodesty in an suggestive way — too little clothing.

III. Immodesty Matters Enough To Address In The Old Testament

- A. God cared about how Adam and Eve dressed.
1. What does God consider naked?
 - a) They were naked and not ashamed (Genesis 2:25).
 - b) They tried to cover themselves with a girdle or loincloth (Genesis 3:7).
 - c) They were still naked (Genesis 3:10-11).
 - d) If God considers the upper and lower body being exposed as nakedness and shameful, we should too.
 2. What does God consider clothed?
 - a) God made them clothing in the form of tunics (or coats) of skin. This was a long, shirt-like garment which normally reached the knees (Genesis 3:21).
 - b) It is also critical to note that when God clothed them, He clothed both the man and the woman, so men, this is important for you too.
 3. God set a standard “in the beginning” and He does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17).
- B. God cared about how the priests dressed.
1. God specified clothing for the priests to cover their nakedness (Exodus 28:40-42; cp. 1 Peter 2:5, 9).
 - a) They had tunics or coats and linen trousers or breeches.
 - b) These garments covered from the shoulders to the knees.
 2. God specified that there were to be no steps going up to the altar to avoid exposing their nakedness (Exodus 20:26). Do you have the same thoughts about your attire?
 - a) Standing up, a skirt or shorts might cover the thigh. What about when you sit?
 - b) When you bend over with a loose blouse or shirt, do you expose your chest?
 - c) What about slits in dresses, tight clothing, and transparent clothing?
- C. God used nakedness to reveal the shame of a person.
1. If the buttocks (Isaiah 20:4; cp. 2 Samuel 10:4; Jeremiah 13:22), thighs (Isaiah 47:2-3), or breasts (Ezekiel 16:7-8) were exposed, it was nakedness.

2. These principles still hold true. Modern swimsuits and bikinis, shorts that are up to the crotch, clothing that is too tight, or too loose, or that exposes the breasts is shameful. This applies to men too!
3. Furthermore, we know how men look at women who are immodest — as tools, not as human beings. When men and women objectify each other, it degrades them.

IV. Immodesty Matters Enough To Address In The New Testament

- A. Peter cared enough to put on a garment in the Lord's presence (John 21:7).
 1. "Naked" meant clad in undergarments only.
 2. What do we typically wear when we go swimming?
- B. The former demoniac cared how he was attired (Luke 8:27, 35).
 1. When he was possessed, Satan had him running around naked.
 2. When he was healed and in his right mind, he was clothed.

V. Immodesty Matters Enough For Us To Care

- A. Lust and stumbling blocks.
 1. Have you ever wondered why the previously examined scriptures focus on women and modest apparel?
 2. Men are instructed not to lust after a woman (Matthew 5:28).
 - a) Women may ask, "Why do I have to change my clothing because some man cannot control his dirty mind?"
 - b) Do you want to be the stumbling block (Luke 17:1-2)? Some men will lust anyway, but do not let it be because of your clothes (cp. Proverbs 7:10)!
- B. Immodest apparel and children.
 1. Should we allow our children to wear immodest apparel?
 - a) Train them up in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6).
 - b) Teach them the scriptures from their youth (2 Timothy 3:15).
 2. Modest apparel may cause children to endure ridicule, but it is good for them to bear the yoke in their youth (Lamentations 3:27).
- C. Is immodest clothing always immodest?
 1. What about sports, work, or weddings? What about the weather?
 2. In what circumstance should a Christian surrender his or her modesty?
- D. What is influencing our dress?
 1. The world (Exodus 23:2; 2 Corinthians 10:12; 1 Peter 4:4)?
 2. Our conscience (Jeremiah 6:15; 1 Timothy 4:2)?
 3. God's word (2 Timothy 2:15)?

Conclusion. Our only desire is to present the members of this congregation as pure and complete in Christ, and that just can't be done with clothing (or a lack thereof) that's going to produce lustful thoughts.

I have no interest in being Pharisaical (making laws where there are no laws). However, I do want to demonstrate that God has a pattern that helps us understand His feelings about this issue. God does care how we dress, and as a congregation, our elders watch for us, and direct and guide us when we do what's inappropriate. It matters for us spiritually and for our reputation as a congregation.