

What Does Our Clothing Show?

Introduction. Summer is one of those times when inevitably one must examine the issue of modest apparel. Our society forces us to evaluate this issue because of the general lack of modesty on the part of many individuals, including members of the church. This is not a sermon which would be accepted by most in the religious world. In fact, this lesson would not be accepted among many brethren.

There is a clear need for study on the subject of modesty. As we address this subject, I want you to consider the fact that everything we do reflects upon us. From your cheerful disposition, your expression, or sordid language, everything reflects upon you. Your clothing is no different. Unspoken signals to the outside world abound through what you decide to wear.

Our present situation in America with regard to fashion and the flaunting of flesh is but one more manifestation of man's rebellion against God; the way of a sinful and perverse generation of men. Clothes are advertised to be "daring," "sexy" and "naughty."

The greater shame is that this shameful rebellion against righteousness is found among members of the church. I have heard of people gladly commenting that a preacher delivered a sermon on modest apparel at a congregation because they needed it. Weak sisters in the Lord assume that sex appeal is a legitimate consideration for them in selecting their wardrobes. They walk the streets in skirts so short that very little is left to the imagination. They even wear those same skirts into the assemblies of the saints where, when they sit down, their clothing does not cover appropriate parts of their bodies.

I. ***Modesty In The Old Testament***

A. Adam and Eve.

1. The human body is not evil. It was a part of God's original creation which was declared to be "good." And in the sinless state of the original human pair, they were naked before each other and before God without shame (Genesis 2:25).
2. Their physical nakedness was typical of their total situation in the Garden of Eden. It was one of absolute openness and freedom. This was an ideal state which could exist only in the absence of sin. There was no shame in viewing or in sharing the joys and pleasures the bodies of husbands and wives can bring to each other.
3. Then came the fall of Adam and Eve. They listened to the false counsel of Satan and rebelled against the authority of God.

4. When sin came, nakedness took on an altogether different meaning (Genesis 3:7)! What had once meant openness and freedom now was connected with shame. So it has been in the eyes of God ever since that day.
 5. When God came to Adam and Eve in the wake of their sin in Eden, He did not tell them to take off their leaf-aprons so as to "recapture their innocence." To the contrary, He indicated that they needed even more clothing than they had made for themselves (Genesis 3:21).
 6. The word for "coats of skins" (KJV) occurs 29 times in the Old Testament and it is variously translated as "coat, coats" (23 times), "garment, garments" (5 times) and "robe" (1 time). It is the same word in Genesis 37:3 for Joseph's "coat" of many colors (the LXX version uses the Greek word that the RSV translates as a "long robe with sleeves"). Different versions follow the KJV translators in other places and translate "coat" as "tunic" or "garment."
 7. Gesenius translates the word as a garment "generally with sleeves, coming down to the knees, rarely to the ankles." The ISBE states that it was "apparently a long, shirtlike tunic worn next to the skin ... the 'coat' was the basic garment over which other apparel might be added. Jesus instructs His followers to give robbers not only the cloak but also the coat which was worn underneath (Luke 6:29; cf. Matthew 5:40)." Jesus also had one and it was valuable because it was seamless (John 19:23).
 8. It was a part of the dress of priests (cf. Exodus 28:40-42). In the wall reliefs from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, men of Lachish are shown wearing long garments with sleeves of varying lengths.
- B. Noah.
1. In Genesis 9:20-23, Noah became drunk with wine and uncovered himself. God considered this both a sin and a shame.
 2. The question before us today is to seek to define what it takes to cover human nakedness so that we can live together without shame
 3. Nakedness was of such a concern that when it was violated, the son of Noah that viewed his father's nakedness was cursed for his sin for the rest of his life.
- C. The Mosaic Law.
1. In Exodus 28:40-43, God gave ordinances for the priest's clothing. Though there was other attire for other purposes, in

order to cover the nakedness of the priests, trousers were to be worn that would cover the man's waist and his thighs. This was a specific area of coverage directly dealing with the covering of nakedness.

2. In the prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 23:18-21), God compares the sin of Jerusalem and Samaria with the activity of a harlot. In this comparison, he uses descriptive terms of a woman's nakedness.
3. In Isaiah 47:1-3, the harlot is one who is dressed with the leg uncovered.
4. In dealing with nakedness, God, in dealing with the man, spoke directly of covering the loin and thigh area. In dealing with the woman, God spoke directly of covering her chest area.
5. Ever since sin came into the world, nakedness was a shame. God taught His people to cover their nakedness. He was very specific in defining nakedness of covering two areas of the human body -- the loins and the chest. We establish this as a godly principle, applicable under all ages.

II. ***Modesty In The New Testament***

A. Paul's instruction to Timothy (1 Timothy 2:9-10).

1. Three words in this passage dictate how a woman is to be dressed: proper clothing, modestly, and discreetly. It must be kept in mind that although Paul is giving instruction as to how women should dress in the public assemblies, the principles doubtless were intended to apply in other situations. If modest apparel is appropriate in worship, it is appropriate everywhere. If what is prohibited in dress is wrong in worship services, it would be difficult to show that it is right elsewhere.
 - a. *Proper or modest clothing* -- the word here used in the original denotes orderliness, to be neatly arranged. It does not mean modest in the sense of being opposed to that which is immodest, or which tends to excite improper desires, but that which is becoming or appropriate. This means that the appearance of a woman will not be offensive to anybody.
 - b. *Modestly or shamefacedness* -- the word means a demeanor of respect and reverence toward others. It is best reflected in a discussion of godly character (Jeremiah 8:10-12). The reason that these questions are today so serious is that we have forgotten how to blush. We feel no sense of shame. We do not feel what Adam felt when he sinned. Our defenses are brought down due to the abundance of the exposure accepted in the society in which we live. Christians

even get bogged down in discussions of what is and what is not proper. If you have to ask, it probably is not.

- c. *Discreetly or sobriety* -- the word means sober-mindedness or moderation of the desires of the flesh. Immodest apparel of today suggest clothing that is designed to expose the body to the view of others. Such an exposure would have been disgraceful and disrespectful. One sign of worldliness is the devotion of excessive time and money to the outward adornment of the body. When you think of a godly woman, how is she dressed?
- B. Peter's instruction to the Christians (1 Peter 3:1-6).
 - 1. As in every other area of godly submission, when we get the heart right, everything else will fall into place. The Christian should dress as to reflect their minds are occupied with nobler things. Their apparel should be models of neatness and appropriateness.
 - 2. If the inner person is as God desires, the outward person in dress will reflect it. What is foremost in the passage is the appropriate ornamentation of the heart.

III. ***Some Objections Answered***

- A. Some will protest that modesty is relative. They argue that the sight of a woman's ankle might have been considered immodest fifty years ago, but today it is not. Others argue that people who live in warm climates and near beaches just do not have the same views on modesty that people living in other situations might legitimately hold. Therefore these people feel that it is impossible to draw a line which separates modest and immodest dress.
- B. The fact is that a line can be drawn between modesty and immodesty. Whenever a person dresses so as to excite sexual desire in others, that person's dress is immodest and sinful. This principle reflects what the Bible teaches about modesty and does not change with the culture or climate. Those who are too young and naive to know the difference have parents or older Christians to counsel them about their clothing.
- C. This principle applies to men as well as women. The well-built, attractive male who parades his body by dress or undress is equally as sinful as the female who uses her indecency as a sexual come-on. And the unattractive teenage boy who washes his car in the front yard or bicycles down the highway in nothing but gym shorts is no less indiscreet than the unattractive girl who sunbathes on the beach or walks the streets in a pair of immodest shorts.

- D. It cannot be wrong for a girl to wear a swimsuit on the beach and right for her to wear one as part of the competition in a beauty contest. It cannot be wrong for her to wear a skirt to Bible class which reveals way too much and right to wear one as a cheerleader or a majorette which reveals the same amount or perhaps more.
- E. The point of all this is to plead for consistency. If we are going to plead for modesty, let us plead for it at all places and in all situations.

IV. ***The World Knows The Perils Of Immodesty***

- A. People of the world are sometimes more honest about clothing than some who claim to be Christians. Non-Christians acknowledge the purposes and perils of immodesty. Designer Leo Narducci says that the woman who wears revealing clothes is one who is "sure of herself, who thinks of sex more openly ... she is not concerned about nudity. She has a body and she knows it!"
- B. Police officials also have some comments to offer. A questionnaire was mailed to officials of 128 cities across the United States by a social studies group. Of the replies received from the largest cities, a ratio of 31 to 1 said they were convinced there was a connection between immodest dress and the rise of sex crimes.
- C. The prison physician of Tombs Prison in New York City said "the so-called crimes of passion are increasing alarmingly, and will continue to do so in my opinion until the principle cause is eliminated. That, it seems to me, is the present style of dress, which, to say the least, is immodest." Immodest dress has a direct bearing on crime instigation, no matter how innocent the wearer may be. Go to the local jail and look at their restrictions of clothing for visitors. Why the restrictions? They know the power of immodest dress!
- D. No one can convince me that women and girls who wear immodest clothing are ignorant of its effects on men. In 1961, the Portuguese ship *Santa Maria* was taken over by 70 rebel pirates. The drama was followed closely by the news media. According to newspaper accounts of that episode, one of the first things that happened on board that ship was that the women passengers stopped wearing shorts, halters, and swimsuits on deck. They were afraid, and they knew that immodest clothing would provoke those pirates to lust and expose them to grave danger. Women know how their dress affects men and men know how their dress affects women!

V. ***Christians Know The Perils Of Immodesty***

- A. A Christian husband and father knows the perils of immodesty. Even if his sons and daughters are be naive about their immodesty, he is not. It is his duty as the spiritual leader of the family to set the standards of modesty for the women in his home. He does not have his family in subjection if he cannot set and enforce such standards, he is not a faithful Christian if he will not set and enforce them.
- B. A Christian wife and mother knows the enticing nature of certain types of clothing. She must first set a good example of personal modesty before her sons and daughters. She must then see to the wardrobes of her children so as to teach them to be modest. Parents, do not deceive yourselves a moment longer thinking that your children will love you more or feel closer to you as a parent if you let them live loosely. How many teenage boys and girls have you heard say their parents "don't care what I do?" They say it with contempt in their voices, not admiration!
- C. A young Christian man knows the effect immodest clothing has on him and his friends. An adolescent male has a difficult enough time with the frustrating sexual stirrings he is experiencing for the first time. Add to that the pressures and enticements of a sex-oriented society where fashion is deliberately designed to stimulate those desires to an even greater level and the result is an intense and cruel temptation. A Christian young man who is pure in heart himself does not want to see his sisters in Christ expose themselves to the gaze of people around them so as to become the objects of their evil lust. Neither does he want them to make his own Christian life more difficult.
- D. Finally, a young Christian lady knows the power of certain types of clothing to "turn men on." It is natural for us to want to eat what others eat, dress as they dress, and live like the people with whom we have contact, especially when we are young. But when conscience demands that we be different in our eating, dressing, or other social activities, we must be prepared to exhibit godly courage and keep ourselves pure.

VI. ***Where Does It All Lead?***

- A. Shorter and shorter shorts, skirts and tops (1 Timothy 4:2).
 - 1. The conscience becomes seared and hardened.
 - 2. Therefore, we begin to expose more and more nakedness.
- B. It makes us more tolerant of other forms of worldliness (2 Timothy 3:13).
 - 1. Mixed swimming is now accepted.

2. Brethren now approve abbreviated attire of majorette, cheerleader, drill team, etc.
- C. It creates more sexual temptations (Romans 13:13; 1 Peter 4:1-4; Galatians 5:19).
 1. Nakedness is associated with sexual impulses and desires.
 2. David was tempted when he saw a woman bathing herself (2 Samuel 11:2).
- D. It makes us resist and resent plain Bible preaching (2 Timothy 4:3-4).
 1. We now claim that modesty is a gray area or that some brethren simply have not made up their minds yet what is immodest.
 2. There are campaigns to change preachers if they don't stop preaching about immodesty. I have known of more than one gospel preacher fired because of tackling this issue.
- E. It softens hearts for the next apostasy (2 Timothy 4:3-4).
 1. Many feel that we should not offend anyone.
 2. Some feel that we need to preach love and the issue will go away. We need to preach Christ and not baptism, one true church, Bible authority, modesty, etc.

VII. ***What Can Be Done?***

- A. I realize that when you do your best to be modest there still exists the possibility that some evil and ungodly people will still look at you and lust. In such case, you are not responsible. But if you have not done all you know to do, or if you have deliberately chosen to wear clothing that the world acknowledges to be sexy and enticing, you are as guilty of sin for provoking lust as the person who looks at you and covets you!
- B. You need to recognize that you must be modest and sensible in your dress to have the favor of God. The clothing you choose must be that which can be worn "modestly and discreetly" (1 Timothy 2:9). As one's dress is a mirror of their heart, Paul urged that a Christian woman not show herself to be carnal and frivolous by her apparel. Instead, let her show her purity of heart with modest attire.
- C. You need to "abstain from all appearance of evil" in your attire, demeanor, and speech (1 Thessalonians 5:22). You do not have to balk at fashionable clothing or seek to be like an eighteenth-century Puritan in dress. Dress in good taste and appropriately for the situation, but never allow the world to set a fashion for you which involves you with the immoral and the indecent. Do not be conformed to the world's evil trends. Do not be someone who

insists on being immodest because immodesty is in fashion!

- D. You need to realize that your purpose in life is to exalt Christ and make it possible for you to shine as a light in a crooked and perverse generation. Dress to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Give your primary attention not to the adorning of your body but of your true, inner self (1 Peter 3:3-4).

Conclusion. May God help His people to exhibit His holiness to the world through modest dress. Remember, the first step toward being modest is wanting to be. There is much more that could be said on this subject, but the important point is that we must investigate our hearts and motives. If you really want to please God and serve Him, you will want to be so attired that when he comes, you will not be as Adam and confess the shame of nakedness. Immodest apparel is a sin that brings on so many other sins. Time fails me to speak of David who not only committed adultery with a woman he saw naked, but also committed murder. The Lord spoke of the lust of the eyes and he called it adultery in the heart. It is a fact that you cannot commit fornication as long as you keep your clothes on (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).