

From Vanity to Virtue

The Transformative Power of Modesty

Introduction. In a culture saturated with messages promoting self-indulgence and self-gratification, modesty stands as a counter-cultural virtue. It calls us to humility and self-control, reminding us that true beauty emanates from within.

Modesty isn't merely a matter of outward appearance; it's a reflection of the state of our hearts. It's an expression of reverence for ourselves, for others, and ultimately for our Creator. When we dress modestly, we honor the temple of the Holy Spirit that resides within us, recognizing that our bodies are sacred vessels created by God Himself.

However, the call to modesty isn't about enforcing a set of rigid rules or stifling individual expression. Instead, it's an invitation to embrace a standard of modesty that's rooted in righteousness and respect for God, ourselves, and others. It's about finding a balance between expressing our unique personalities while also upholding the godly values of decency and propriety.

As we delve deeper into this topic today, let's approach it with open hearts, seeking to understand how we can embody the principles of modesty in our lives. May we be guided by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in two main Scriptures and several supporting ones, as we strive to honor God in all that we do, including how we present ourselves to the world.

I. God Encourages Emphasizing the Inner Spirit

- A. Peter's instruction to husbands and wives emphasizes the inner spirit (1 Peter 3:1-7).
 1. Don't let your adornment be merely outward (i.e. from without). Peter doesn't condemn arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel, but simply deemphasizes them (a "not ... but" construction).
 2. Rather, "let it be the hidden person of the heart."
 - a) With "the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit."
 - (1) It is an "imperishable quality" (NASB), "lasting beauty" (NET), and "unfading beauty" (NLT, NIV).
 - (2) "Gentle" means "mild or humble" (cp. Matthew 5:5; 21:5) and "quiet" means "still, peaceable, or undisturbed" (cp. 1 Timothy 2:2).
 - b) This spirit is "very precious in the sight of God" (cp. Mark 14:3).
 3. Though specifically for women, these instructions apply to men too (1 Peter 3:7). They don't get the right to be vain and ignore virtue in their lives,
- B. Paul's instruction regarding the saints emphasizes the inner spirit (1 Timothy 2:8-11).
 1. Men are to lift up holy hands, which emphasizes both inner and outer quality.
 - a) Getting back to the matter of public worship (cp. v. 1), the apostle mentions men lifting up their hands in prayer, indicating earnest desire.
 - b) "Holy" means devout, pious, and pleasing to God. Linked to lifting up holy hands is the idea of moral purity. We can't pray effectively unless our lives are clean and committed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

- c) Nothing does more to alienate the mind from sincere prayer and poison worship than an attitude of anger and a quarrelsome spirit. Paul says much more about male offenses elsewhere in this letter.
- 2. Women are to dress modestly, with propriety and moderation.
 - a) “Not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing.”
 - b) “But which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.”
 - (1) Three words describe the focus of apparel in this passage.
 - (a) “Modest” means “well arranged or seemly.”
 - (b) “Propriety” is “reverence, regard for others, and respect.” It’s decent clothing. As you might imagine, the exact opposite of this is nakedness, which characterizes a lot of clothing today.
 - (c) “Moderation” is “soundness of mind and self-control.” It’s clothing that demonstrates good sense and discretion. It demonstrates a willingness to be transformed rather than conformed (Romans 12:2).
 - (2) This is proper for a woman professing (announcing or proclaiming) godliness. You look at her and instantly know that she’s godly.
 - (3) “With good works” distinguishes our conduct from our apparel in this text. Women “make themselves attractive by the good things they do” (NLT). They do “something beautiful for God and become beautiful doing it” (The Message).
 - c) “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.”
 - (1) The emphasis is on quietness (i.e. silence) and submission.
 - (2) This is comparable to Peter’s “without a word” in 1 Peter 3:1.

II. Do We Encourage Emphasizing the Inner Spirit?

- A. This same principle is encouraged in other areas of our spiritual lives (cp. Matthew 23:25-28; Luke 11:39-41).
 - 1. Paul had concerns about younger widows becoming busy bodies (1 Timothy 5:11-14; cp. 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).
 - 2. All men were to aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind their own business (cp. 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12; 1 Peter 4:15).
- B. When the inner spirit is right, it’ll manifest itself outwardly (Matthew 15:11-20).
 - 1. This means guarding our hearts (Proverbs 4:23; Psalm 19:14).
 - 2. This means renewing our minds (Psalm 51:10; Ephesians 4:20-23).
- C. Three practical questions.
 - 1. Should I dress as a duffel bag in order to manifest my inner spirit?
 - a) God approves of beauty. As a matter of fact, the holy garments were encrusted with jewels in Exodus 28:40.
 - (1) Clearly there’s nothing wrong with physical attraction between men and women. God gave us eyes, and most happily married couples got where they are because they were first attracted by the sight of one another.
 - (2) Naomi understood this principle. She urged Ruth to fix herself up before she returned to meet with Boaz (Ruth 3:3). However, Boaz

- proves to us that a real man doesn't end his estimation of a woman's beauty at her curves; a real man investigates a woman's character.
- b) One can be pretty outwardly, but unattractive on the inside. Another one can be unattractive on the outside, but beautiful on the inside (cp. Proverbs 31:21-22, 30). Of course, we understand that beauty and righteousness aren't either/or propositions, but we do have to consider which is more precious in the sight of God. Which should we value and emphasize more?
2. Should I become a door mat or a wallflower to manifest my inner spirit?
 - a) Women are created in the image of God and have intrinsic value. They shouldn't devalue themselves (Proverbs 31:23-29, 31; Galatians 3:28; 1 Peter 3:7).
 - b) Women in the Bible, such as Job's daughters, Deborah, Esther, Ruth, Anna, and Mary, all show how much God values faithful, proactive women.
 - (1) The first time Boaz and Ruth spoke, we find that he was attracted to her character above all else. She asked his permission to glean in his fields, and he urged her to glean nowhere else. He wanted to reward her because he had heard how honorably Ruth had behaved toward Naomi (Ruth 2:11-12).
 - (2) It's a testament to the character of Boaz that his first comment about Ruth wasn't about her beauty or her body. Instead, his first words were to praise Ruth for her loving spirit. Ruth's kindness affected Boaz's heart more than her beauty and body pleased his eyes.
 3. What should I do to train my child to manifest a beautiful inner spirit?
 - a) Children of this world are taught from an early age to emphasize physical beauty. How much time do our young people spend worrying about their looks? Probably quite a bit.
 - b) Parents, your responsibility is to foster the emphasis of inner beauty early (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). How much time do our young people spend worrying about their character? Probably not as much as they should.
 - c) If your children, daughters especially, don't learn to value who they are over what they look like, they'll invariably have unhealthy self-esteem issues, and this will inevitably manifest itself in their selection of a spouse.
 - (1) This also applies to young men — they'll pick the beauty queen instead of wisely evaluating a young woman's level of spiritual interest.
 - (a) There's nothing in the world more attractive to a spiritually-minded man than a spiritually-minded woman. A man who loves God and wants to go to heaven should care more about the purity of a woman's heart than he cares about her looks.
 - (b) If your first criteria is to find a woman who's celibate, pure of heart, and who longs for fellowship with God, then you'll have found a woman whose worth is far above rubies (Proverbs 31:10).
 - d) Fathers, you'll not hurt your children by withholding makeup from your daughters, or the latest and greatest fashions from your sons.

- (1) Wait for them to demonstrate that they value what's more important before you let them handle what's less important.
 - (2) Many fathers give in much too early for fear of what others in the world may think, instead of abstaining in fear of what God may think and what's actually best for their child's character (cp. Lamentations 3:27; Luke 16:15).
- e) If you lead in such a way, you'll set the stage to avoid major challenges with modest apparel, evil companions, and other issues that arise during the maturation process of your children.

Conclusion. A good pastor by qualification has to be a teacher of his people. If his congregation is made up of thoughtful, growing believers, they'll be receptive to learning and applying godly principles of living.

All I can ask you is to be open-hearted about something that weighs heavy on the hearts of all godly people. I understand that each person has the right to express themselves as they see fit, and I support individuality and self-expression. But our concern for the way you dress comes from a place of genuine care for your well-being.

When you dress immodestly, it's not just about the clothes you wear; it's about the message you convey to the world and the impact it may have on yourself and others. There are always consequences, both immediate and long-term, that may arise from dressing in a manner that could attract sexually-charged attention or lead to misinterpretation of your intentions.

Moreover, by dressing modestly, you show respect not only for God and yourself, but also for those around you. You acknowledge the value of modesty in fostering healthy relationships built on mutual respect and dignity. You demonstrate your commitment to upholding your own worth and integrity in a world that definitively prioritizes superficiality over substance.

Women aren't eye-candy; they're people, and they have souls. If men desire women who love the Lord, men should make it known, like Boaz did. Those kinds of women are out there — the pure and godly ones. A lot more women would nurture a "gentle and quiet spirit" if men were more like Boaz and advertised for spiritually-minded women.

I believe in your inherent worth and dignity, and I want to see you thrive in every aspect of your life. I encourage you to consider the impact of your clothing choices and to reflect on how they align with your godly values and aspirations. We're members of this body to work together to cultivate a culture of righteousness, respect, and dignity.

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