

MODESTY

by Douglas W. Hill

"In like manner, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety; not with braided hair, and gold or pearls or costly raiment; but (which becometh women professing godliness) through good works." (1 Timothy 2:9-10).

Modesty is a Bible subject. Many passages have something to say about how we dress and about what our clothing says of us. Thus, we are not trying to offend, though truth often offends (Matt. 15:12-13, Gal. 4:16). Rather, we only want to speak the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Titus 2:4, 15) so that we may walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:5-10; 2:3-6; 3:2-3).

Consider the beauty of a gold ring. Many recognize that it is attractive, appealing, valuable and precious. Now, place that gold ring in the snout of a pig. What do you think? Is it as appealing as before? Is it out of place? As it is written, "As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, So is a lovely woman who lacks discretion." (Prov. 11:22) God's word says that women can misuse their physical beauty by being indiscrete. The word "discretion" means to have taste, or perception, intelligence, judgment, reason and understanding. Ladies, do you dress with spiritual understanding and intelligence? Let us examine some of what God says about how we dress.



1 TIMOTHY 2 :9-10

The very first passage cited in this study uses three words to express what God wants: Modest apparel, shamefastness, sobriety.

Modest apparel means "orderly, decorous, proper, of good behavior, modest". What kind of clothing is "orderly" and "proper" for Christians? Simply, clothing that is in harmony with God's word. God's word says to flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness with

those who have a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22). It also says we should possess our own bodies in sanctification and honor, not in the passion of lust as those who do not know God (1 Thess. 4:1-8). Passion, evil desire, sexual immorality are to be put away from our lives (Col. 3:5). These, and many other passages, make it clear that we are not to promote immoral thoughts or actions. Thus, to be "modest" in our clothing, we must dress in a way that is not provocative, tantalizing, accentuating the body in a way that draws attention in a sexual way. Christians are to dress modestly, properly.

The second word used is shamefastness. This refers to the inward aversion to everything that is unseemly. It is a sense of shame that causes us to shrink back from things which stir up immoral and sensual desires. We are not talking about a scripturally married couple in the privacy of their home (Heb. 13:4), but are talking about illicit sexuality in thoughts, words or actions. When sexual desire is outside of the proper place of marriage - we should have a sense of embarrassment and discomfort which moves us away from it.

In contrast to this godly attitude, our society is shameless. "If you've got it, flaunt it!" People walk around in clothing that is revealing and that is designed to draw stares and stir up sexual interest. This attitude is actually condemned in Galatians 5:19 as "lasciviousness". This word identifies the attitude that is wanton, uncontrolled, unrestrained. It is the heart that willingly displays the flesh and delights in the attention it gains. It is the very opposite of a godly attitude.

The third word, sobriety, means "soundness of mind". It is the mind that is not under the influence and control of Satan, of alcohol, or drugs, or lustful desires, pride, etc. A sound mind thinks in harmony with God's will, understands the dangers and influence of immorality in conduct and clothing, and makes spiritually healthy decisions. In contrast, we can consider how someone who is under the influence of sin will cloth themselves. As Paul wrote, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose

glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." (Phil. 3:18-19) What controls the thoughts of those who mind earthly things? What dominates the behavior of those whose God is their own "belly" (appetite, desire)?

N.T. EXAMPLES

Clearly, God is concerned about how we dress. So, what are some examples of proper clothing and improper clothing?

In 1 Tim. 2:9-10 we read of the braiding of hair, putting on of gold, pearls and costly raiment. Emphasizing these things stands in contrast with godliness. The costly raiment in New Testament times was typically silk or very fine fabric. This kind of fabric clings to the body and reveals the form in a provocative way. Also, these fabrics were at times sheer or effectively transparent. In other words, they dressed like the modern day Hollywood "stars". I don't watch such things, but have briefly seen advertisements or news concerning the Academy Awards. It seems that such people are in a contest to see who can be the most revealing and sensual in their attire. Things like this are, to a Christian, unthinkable. Godly people realize that these things just do not fit with being servants of the Lord.

Also, when we read of putting on gold and jewels, this is a reference to ostentatious, flamboyant, or showy behavior. Compare 1 Peter 3:1-6. This expresses the same points as 1 Tim. 2:9-10, clearly emphasizing the inner man over the outward man. These passages are not outlawing the braiding of hair, the wearing of any jewelry, or the wearing of any clothing - they are teaching us to not be sinful, excessive, gaudy, sensual, fleshly in how we dress. The "meek and quiet spirit" is of "great price" before God (1 Pet. 3:4), but not the bawdy, worldly spirit. The "incorruptible clothing" of a godly spirit is what "holy women" are praised for (3:4-6), not the corruptible clothing of the unholy.

O.T. EXAMPLES

There are more N. T. examples of what is and is not modesty, but let us look at a few in the Old Law. While we are not under the Old Law (Col. 2:14-19), there are yet many things we can

learn from it that are parallels to the New Testament principles (1 Cor. 10:6, 10).

After Adam and Eve sinned, they became aware of things they were not aware of before. They realized they were naked, without any clothing, and attempted to cover themselves with fig leaf aprons (Gen. 3:7). This covered "the essentials", but we find this was not enough (Gen. 3:8-10). They still knew they were naked, insufficiently clothed, and hid themselves from God.

After meting out punishment for their sins, God gave Adam and Eve "coats of skins" and "clothed" them (Gen. 3:21). Here we see that God is concerned for what men and women wear. The "coats" are defined by Wilson's O.T. Word Studies as covering from the shoulders to the knees, sometimes longer. From this we see the basic pattern for what God considers acceptable clothing. "Coats" of skin would not be form fitting and provocative. "Coats" of skin would not be sheer or see through. "Coats" of skin were designed to "cloth" their bodies, not accentuate and reveal them in a sensual, eye catching way.

We see another example of what God thinks about modesty in Exodus 20:26. Here God forbade the priests from going up steps to an altar. Why? "That thy nakedness be not uncovered thereon." In other words, the priests wore linen robes and if they went up steps and stood higher than the people around them - it would reveal more of their body than God wanted them to reveal in public. Again, we see the intent of clothing is to "cover" the body. And we also see that one who is acceptably dressed must still be careful of situations that may inadvertently (unintentionally) reveal their nakedness.

Stair cases with open side rails, elevated platforms, and similar things must be watched out for if you are in a dress. Skirts (or "long" shorts) that reach the knees while standing can rise above the knees while sitting. Slits in skirts and dresses that are long may defeat and undermine God's purpose of covering to the knees. We must be wise and spiritually minded when we consider how we dress.

Also, Exodus 28:42-43 shows that God instructed the priests to wear linen breeches under their robes. These were like underpants that covered the loins and down to the knees.

This protected them from accidentally revealing their nakedness. Certainly, for clothing that comes to the knees or just below, an under garment is advisable and wise.

Ezekiel 16:7-8 compares the city of Jerusalem to a young woman. When God found her in impurity, he raised her up. When she grew and was naked, her chest was uncovered, God provided clothing for her. The illustration goes on, but this is our point. Revealing the upper body, the chest is "nakedness". We saw this in Genesis 3:21 where God gave "coats" of skin that covered from the shoulders to the knees. But we need to pay special attention to this again. Many today are apparently not mindful of revealing their chest. It may be the armless shirts or spaghetti straps. It may be the low neckline or "V" cut shirts that reveal cleavage. Whatever it is, it is "nakedness".

Also, as with clothing that comes to the knees, we must be careful of situations where what is modest in one position may become immodest in another. A shirt that has very short sleeves may cover everything when the arms are down, but reveal much when the arms are raised. A loose neckline that may cover everything when standing upright, may also reveal too much when bending forward. Remember, holy women are "of sound mind". Let us always make good judgments regarding our clothing.

THE IMPACT OF "SHAMEFASTNESS"

It is important to consider again the influence of this godly attitude upon how we dress. Sometimes, we approach God's word with the attitude "What is the **least** required of me." If we do this in the area of clothing, then we may be missing the mark. Remember that shamefastness is a sense of shame that shrinks back from unseemly things. It is an aversion and an avoidance of things wrong. In other words, the shamefast spirit will not want to see how much they can "get away with". Nor will the holy in spirit see how close they can get to fire before they get burned. Christians are to develop a sense of moral dignity based upon God's word, which essentially shows itself in revulsion for sin.

As 2 Timothy 2:22 says, we are to "flee" youthful lusts. Run away from them. Do not play

nearby, do not think foolishly that "I won't give in" (1 Cor. 10:12). Be wise, be prudent, be discrete.

"BE YE HOLY AS I AM HOLY"

In summary, all the above is about being holy. First Peter 1:16 and other passages tell us that we should be holy as God is holy. Holiness is being "separate" from sin and corruption. We also see that holiness is beautiful (Prov. 29:2; 2 Chron. 20:21). Instead of being conformed to the world, we need to renew the spirit of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2) and think in the way that God thinks. Physical beauty has a place (Heb. 13:4), but it pales in comparison to the true beauty of holy and godly character. Do we see as God does? Can we see ladies with discretion as truly beautiful in heart and character?

There are many other passages in the Old and New Testaments that help to clarify what is and is not modest (Prov. 7:10; John 21:7; Isaiah 3:16-24; Rev. 3:18; etc.). But these are enough to make it very clear - How we dress is important to God. In fact, it can make the difference between going to heaven or going to hell.



North Sparta church of Christ

359 N. Spring St. • Sparta, TN 38583

(931) 836-3321

NSCOC@Frontiernet.net

[Http://Frontiernet.net/~NSCOC](http://Frontiernet.net/~NSCOC)

"Moreover God said, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks and flirting eyes, wiggling as they go, with jingling ornaments on their feet; therefore the Lord brings sores on the crown of the head of the women of Zion, and God will make their scalps bald." (Isaiah 3:16-24)