

Modesty From the Heart (1 Tim 2:9)

Introduction – The sin of immodesty is all around us. Summertime can be a time where young women fall into this sin, in some cases willfully, and in other cases ignorantly. But hearts that love the Lord Jesus seek to love Him with all their mind and understanding, and with all of their body and clothing.

Some Definitions – When it comes to our relativistic culture, sweeping downward into grosser and lewder acceptabilities, the Christian culture has a hard time not looking like it's running after the general culture, but only a couple steps (or maybe a half a generation) behind. Sometimes, some word studies can provide some helpful foundations.

Modesty, *kosmios* – The word means “respectable, honorable”. Modern definitions of “modesty” include “having or showing a moderate estimation of one’s own talents, abilities and value,” “reserve or propriety in speech, dress, or behavior,” “proceeding from a disinclination to call attention to oneself,” “free from showiness or ostentation.”

Propriety, Shamefacedness, *airos* – It means “a sense of shame or honor, reverence, regard for others,” “a shrinking away from trespassing the boundaries of propriety.” Modesty, therefore, does not seek to find the edge of the envelope. It understands the boundaries and desires to stay well within them.

Moderation, Sobriety, *sophrosune* – The word meant “soundness of mind, self-control,” “reasonableness, good-judgment.” Towards women, it had the idea of self-mastery in the physical appetites with a particular sexual nuance.

Excess and Sensuality – In all three of these words, Paul is addressing the two ways women are tempted to call attention to themselves inappropriately. Paul was concerned about them showing off their wealth. But ostentatious display was also the dress of harlots; their ostentatiousness was directed at their sexual availability.

God, Ashamedness, and Clothes – The story of Adam and Eve begins with this married couple naked and unashamed (Gen 2:25). Upon their fall, the first thing they see after they eat of the forbidden fruit, is that they are naked, and shamefully they sew fig leaves for themselves (3:7). Loin cloths for themselves and hiding in the woods from God, though, provide nothing for their nakedness before Him. God then makes tunics, a long shirt-like garment, from animal skins and clothes them (3:21).

The Gospel – The first and main point of this story is the gospel. Lost in our own sin, shame, and nakedness, we fail in our own attempts to cover our sin. It is too little, it is without sacrifice, and it is our own works. God then provides efficacious garments for Adam and Eve. These garments cover their whole bodies, they come at the expense of the death of another, and they come all by the grace and mercy of God. This is a type which is later fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Other Clothes – One could also point to the kind of clothes God gave for the priesthood (Ex 28:3-4), and for the saints in heaven (Rev 3:18). In both cases, tunics, or long, flowing robes, are given. From fig-leaves to white robes, we must see that clothes tell stories. Our clothing speaks.

Nakedness – Throughout the scripture, public nakedness becomes a euphemism for male and female reproductive parts exposed shamefully and under the judgment of God (Lev 18:6-7, Is 47:1-3, Nah 3:2, Ezek 16:37).

Nakedness –vs- Biblical Eroticism (Songs 2:3, 16, 5:1) – None of this is to say that God is against sex, sensuality, and the intimate pleasures given in marriage. Song of Solomon and other places in the scriptures show us that sexual enjoyment of our spouse and for our spouse with our eyes, hands, mouth, nose, and ears, are all appropriate, good, right, expected, and commanded (1 Cor 7:3-5). The protective bounds of covenant vows are for the purpose of a restoration of unashamed nakedness between husband and wife.

Modesty from the Heart – So what is Paul getting after in 1 Tim 2:9? Simply a dress-code of sorts for believers? No. God is concerned first of all with the heart. But we must worship our Lord with our soul *and* our bodies (1 Cor 6:19-20). If exposing the privates is shameful, one must consider whether dressing in order to draw attention to those parts while clothed is also immodest. So much of women’s clothing is self-consciously designed and marketed to conceal and yet reveal or sensuously draw attention.

For Women – The goal of much of today’s clothing is to encourage men to lust after you. You may object that you never intended that; but you must remember and learn that clothing speaks in a culture. Why do you want to wear that when you know what it is saying (and you should ask your older sisters, your mother and your father and not trust yourself). There is a thing called natural beauty and there is nothing wrong with having it. But men do not buy the swimsuit issues because of natural beauty. They buy them to lust. And in wisdom, you must learn the difference in your own dress.

For Men (Job 31:1, Matt 5:27-30) – While our culture has all but legitimized all sorts of public sensual display, that gives men no license for the sin of voyeurism. We may not, in the name of Christian liberty, watch all that the media “allows” us to watch, nor what our neighbor’s wife or daughter allow us to see.

The Heart – Let us stress this. One can dress modestly while still holding to a prideful and sinful heart, and a legalistic mindset only encourages such wickedness. But if the heart is right, one cannot dress (for long) lavishly and sensually. Women are to be adorned with good works (1 Tim 2:10). *“Undoubtedly, the dress of a virtuous and godly woman must differ from that of a strumpet....piety must be testified by works, this profession ought also to be visible in chaste and becoming dress.”* – Calvin