

Six Questions about Modesty

The Holy Spirit instructs in 1 Timothy 2:9-10, “...That the adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.”

Whenever warmer weather comes and spring and summer style come into season again, it is good to remind and ask ourselves some basic questions about the issue of modesty.

1. How Is Modesty Defined? There are three words used in the text above that help answer this question:

◆ **“Modest apparel.”** In the Greek this is the word *kosmios* (κόσμιος), meaning, “*put in order, adorn or decorate*” (Bauer, Arnt & Gingrich, p. 445). The verb form of this word is translated “adorn” in this same passage. Paul literally instructed Timothy to teach them to “order themselves in orderly apparel.” Our clothing must be that which matches the responsibilities and relationships which are a part of the Christian life—respect for others, morality, humility, avoidance of sin, etc.

◆ **“Propriety.”** The word here is *aidos* (αἰδώς), which communicates both a “sense

of shame” and a “*sense of honor*” (Kittel *abridged* p. 26). The King James renders this “shamefacedness.” The Bible teaches that our bodies are “temples” of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Christians should feel a sense of honor that leads us to present ourselves decently, and a sense of shame when this is not the case.

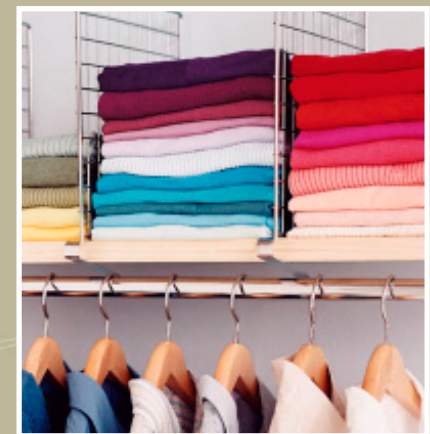
◆ **“Moderation.”** The Greek is *sophrosune* (σωφροσύνη) meaning, “*good sense, sound judgement*” (Newman, p. 178). This addresses soundness of mind as opposed to intoxication or senility. The King James renders this “sobriety.” We must think soberly about what our attire communicates to others about our values, intentions, and priorities.

2. Do I Know What The Bible Says About Modesty? While the Bible does not lay down a dress code for Christians, principles and instructions regarding modesty run throughout both Old and New Testaments. First, we learn in 1 Corinthians 12:23,24 the basic truth that there are “**presentable**” and “**unpresentable parts.**” Though the world around us has rejected this basic truth, Scripture teaches that the unpresentable parts “**have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need.**”

The reason Scripture offers for concealing certain parts of the body relates to the marriage relationship. In marriage a man and woman give themselves physically and emotionally to one another. 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 teaches that each partner has authority over

the body of the other. Leviticus 18:1-30 condemns a variety of sexual relations. Verse eight of this text forbids a person “uncovering” the nakedness of his father’s wife because, “**it is your father’s nakedness.**” There are certain parts of our bodies which should be preserved for our mates alone. Not because they are “dirty” but because God would have us save them for that one person in our lives to whom we have committed our life, love, and honor.

3. Does My Apparel Provoke Others To Lust? In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught, “**...whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart**” (Matthew 5:28). While this is primarily a challenge to each of us individually to control our thoughts, we must also recognize the responsibility we each have not to put temptation before others. The man who takes off his shirt while working in the heat may unwittingly put an obstacle be-



fore someone he doesn't even know. The woman dressing in tight fitting or low cut attire may do the same. Of course, we can't control fully what others choose to think but we can avoid unnecessarily presenting temptation to them.

4. *Do I Dress To Show Off?* Of the specific items of clothing mentioned in some of the texts related to modesty, what is specifically condemned is high priced "showy" clothing (i.e. gold, pearls, etc.). This does not appear to be a condemnation of these specific items but rather anything which serves to show off our wealth, physical attributes, or status. In Christ we are to emphasize the inner man. Clothing that flaunts one's beauty or material status demonstrates an improper perspective on spiritual matters, and an attempt to exalt ourselves over others.

5. *How Do I Carry Myself?* Modesty is often demonstrated as much by our attitude and conduct as it is by our clothing. When Proverbs six and seven warns the young man of the peril of adultery it speaks of both the attire and a disposition against which one should guard himself. The Adulteress is clothed, "**with the attire of a harlot**" (7:10). Yet, she also has a "**crafty heart**" (7:10) and is "**loud and rebellious**" (7:11). She uses "**enticing speech**" and "**flattering lips**" (7:21) in order to "**allure...with her eyelids**" (6:25). Christian men and women must demonstrate modesty in their attire and in their manner and disposition.

6. *Am I Willing To Be Different?* It would be nice to imagine that the standards of modesty and decency will improve in our world. If recent trends are any indication I don't think we can count on that happening anytime soon. As a result we must come to grips with the fact that the way we cloth ourselves and conduct ourselves must be dramatically different from what the world around us. This demands courage on our part. We must choose *long* when *short* is popular. We must look "old fashioned" when the new is revealing. Our assurance (as with all things) must be that when we do what God commands, He is pleased with us regardless of what the world thinks of us. We must remember, "**...Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart**" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Kyle Pope

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P.O. Box 20399 • Amarillo TX, 79114

<http://www.ancientroadpublications.com>

kmpope@att.net

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