

Pleasing God – Modesty

- 1) The purpose of the Christian life is to be pleasing to God. This desire flows out of a proper fear of the Lord.
 - A) “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him” (2 Cor 5:9, ESV).¹
- 2) Our desire to please God affects every area of our lives, even the mundane and habitual aspects of daily life (like eating and drinking).
 - A) “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).
 - B) “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17).
- 3) One such area of life (and the main focus of this study) is our clothing. God’s Word reveals that He cares about what we choose to wear.
 - A) “I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works” (1 Tim 2:8–10).
- 4) In this passage, Paul tells us that one of the considerations (there are others) that women should take into account when they are choosing what to wear is modesty (2:9). The Greek word for modesty is *aidous*. Several English versions translate it as “modesty” (ESV, NASB, NET, NRS). The KJV translates it as “shamefacedness.” In this particular case, I like how the KJV translates the word because it captures what is at the heart of *aidous*—a sense of shame.² Conclusion—God wants women to dress themselves with a proper sense of shame.
 - A) The command is addressed to women, but this does not mean that men are exempt from what Paul is saying. As we’ll see later in our study, the principles of modesty apply equally to both genders (*God clothed Adam as well as Eve and was concerned with exposure of nakedness by men as well as women*).
- 5) What does Paul mean when he says that we should dress with a sense of shame? He is not talking about the shame that comes from doing something wrong. Rather, he is referring to

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*. The word occurs only here in the NT.

“[that] sense of honor which hinders one from doing an unworthy [or shameful] act.”³ William Hendriksen comments: “[modesty] indicates a sense of shame, a shrinking from trespassing the boundaries of propriety.”⁴ This means that modesty knows the boundaries and desires to stay within them—it doesn’t desire to show off.⁵

- 6) Let’s take a closer look at the connection between a sense of shame and modesty of dress. To do this, we need to go back to the beginning of the created order as recorded in Genesis. God created Adam and Eve in complete holiness and perfection. Prior to the fall, both of them were naked and the text specifically states that they were not ashamed. This is the first time in the Bible that we have a connection between shame and dress.
- A) “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25).
- 7) The state of being naked and unashamed did not last long. Eve, being deceived, ate the forbidden fruit. She gave it to Adam and he, not being deceived, deliberately choose to disobey God and join his wife in sin (1 Tim 2:13–14). What was the first consequence of their disobedience? Their eyes were opened and their first sensation was shame that they were naked. The word “shame” is not used directly in the text; however, we can infer that they were ashamed because of two things: a) they immediately created coverings for themselves (*implying that they were distressed enough about their realization to do something about it*) and b) they hid from God when they heard Him in the garden. Thus, sin brought spiritual death (separation from God), physical death (they both immediately began to age and die) and shame (nakedness is now connected to a sense of shame).
- A) “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself’” (Gen 3:7–10).
- 8) What was Adam and Eve’s solution for covering their nakedness? Genesis tells us that they made “loincloths” for themselves. The Hebrew word used (*hagorot*) refers to something that is worn about the waist. Thus their solution was merely a covering for the waist area (topless dress). This covering seemed to ease their shame for the moment, but when they heard God in the garden, the text suggests that they were still ashamed to be seen by God.
- A) Secular anthropologists have rejected the biblical rationale for clothing (a sense of shame) because of cultures where people live unclothed and unashamed. Romans 1:21–

³ R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the NT*, p. 67.

⁴ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1979), 106.

⁵ Jeff Pollard, *Christian Modesty*, p. 3.

25 teaches us that this condition is the result of God handing sinful men over to their degrading lusts. Sin can cause us to lose our appropriate sense of shame (cf. Phil 3:19 – “glory in shame”). Cultures where nakedness is the norm are morally degraded.

- 9) God validated their sense of shame and connected it to their disobedience. And throughout the rest of Scripture, God consistently connects shame and disgrace with exposure of nakedness.
- A) “He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’” (Gen 3:11).
 - B) “Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your disgrace shall be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no one” (Isa 47:3).
 - C) “Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame” (Nah 3:5).
 - D) “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see” (Rev 3:17–18).
- 10) Did God accept their Adam and Eve’s solution and consider their nakedness to be covered? No, God rejected their solution and instead clothed them with “coats of skin.”⁶ We can draw several important conclusions from this:
- A) God personally established guidelines for modesty. God killed animals and crafted garments for them to wear.
 - B) The primary purpose of clothing is to cover nakedness. Implied is God’s rejection of their solution as insufficient.
 - C) God wants our nakedness to be covered and His initiative should be considered as normative for us today. God cared enough to kill an animal, the first death recorded in Scripture, and clothe Adam and Eve.
 - D) Covering the reproductive parts of the body is not sufficient to cover nakedness. Adam and Eve had covered their waists, yet God considered them to still be in need of covering.
- 11) How much of the body was covered by the clothing God made? The Hebrew word used to
- _____

⁶ The text does not say that God made a sacrifice to atone for Adam and Eve’s sins. People read this into the text.

describe Adam and Eve's garments is *kuttonet*. This same root word is used in the OT in reference to Joseph's coat of many colors, the coats worn by the priests and Tamar's long robe (*sometimes the garment had sleeves but it is not clear whether this was always the case*). An examination of these passages leads us to conclude that God's "coat" covered the torso (*it hung from the shoulders*), the waist and some portion of the legs.

- A) "Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors" (Gen 37:3).
- B) "For Aaron's sons you shall make coats and sashes and caps. You shall make them for glory and beauty. And you shall put them on Aaron your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests" (Exod 28:40–41).
- C) "Now she [Tamar] was wearing a long robe with sleeves, for thus were the virgin daughters of the king dressed. So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. And Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long robe that she wore. And she laid her hand on her head and went away, crying aloud as she went" (2 Sam 13:18–19).

12) God was personally involved in the design of the clothing that was to be worn by the priests. It included several pieces of outer-wear and also one piece of under-wear. These "linen breeches" were intended to cover the bare flesh of their upper leg: from the waist (hip) to the thighs (down to the knees). The primary intent behind this piece of under-wear was to avoid exposure of nakedness during priestly service. This leads us to the conclusion that God's "coat" covered the lower body from the hip to the knee (avoiding exposure of the thigh area).

- A) "You shall make for them linen breeches to cover their bare flesh; they shall reach from the loins even to the thighs. They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they enter the tent of meeting, or when they approach the altar to minister in the holy place, so that they do not incur guilt and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and to his descendants after him" (Exod 28:42–43, NASB).
- B) "If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it. 'And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it'" (Exod 20:25–26, NASB).

13) The passages above lead us to the following picture of the garment God used to cover Adam and Eve:

- A) The garment covered the torso, the waist and the thigh (hip to knee). This gives us a biblical guideline to follow when we consider what to wear.
- B) When selecting what to wear, we should consider what activities we will be involved in (both range of movement and potential for exposure) and dress in such a way that we

will be covered.

- C) These principles should govern our clothing choices in general. There are instances where wearing less clothing is considered acceptable (e.g. husband and wife intimacy, when we are alone, babies and the very young, etc.). Because of this, I would counsel that we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we apply these principles to the various situations that arise in daily life.

14) What kind of clothing did Jesus wear while on earth? Jesus' example when it comes to clothing is important to our understanding of modesty.

- A) We have limited data on Jesus' clothing in the gospels. The clearest picture we have is found in John 19:23–24 which is a record of the Roman soldiers taking Jesus' clothing and dividing it between them. His clothing consisted of "outer garments" (*ta himatia*, plural) and an inner tunic (*chiton*).
- B) Historical and archeological sources provide us enough information to understand what this clothing was like: the outer garment(s) was typically a long robe which was worn on top of the inner tunic. It could be used as a protection against the cold, to carry things and for ornamentation. It could also be torn as a sign of grief without leaving the wearer naked. The inner tunic was a shirt-like garment which was worn against the skin. It was longer than our button-up shirts and reached down to the knee or ankle.⁷
- C) There were, of course, other articles of clothing common to Jesus' time not mentioned specifically in this passage: the loincloth, the belt, the sandal and a variety of headgear. Suffice to say, Jesus' clothing covered the torso, the waist and the thigh.

15) Two stories in the gospels have bearing on our understanding of modesty: Jesus washing the disciples' feet and Peter fishing after Jesus' resurrection.

- A) John 13:4–5 recounts the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. John tells us that he "laid aside his outer garments" (*ta himatia*, plural), wrapped a towel around his waist and washed the disciples' feet. How are we to understand this? John 13–19 is a continuous narrative in which Jesus leaves the upper room, goes to the garden, is taken by the authorities and is eventually crucified. Thus, the clothing divided by the soldiers at the cross (John 19) is the same clothing Jesus had on before he washed the disciples' feet (John 13). When Jesus laid aside his outer garments (*ta himatia*), he still had on his inner garment (*chiton*) which he girded with a towel in order to dry their feet. This is a very different picture than the notion of Jesus stripped naked with only a towel wrapped around His waist.
- B) John 21 recounts the story of Peter, John and five other disciples out fishing after Jesus' resurrection. They had fished all night and caught nothing. Jesus appeared on the shore,

⁷ I'm drawing from Dr. Donald Garner's article in *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible* pgs. 220–221.

told them to cast their net on the other side and immediately the net filled with fish. John exclaimed to Peter that it was “the Lord” and Peter put on his “outer garment” (*ependutes*), “for he was naked” (*gumnos*, KJV), and jumped into the sea. How are we to understand this? Was Peter out fishing all night with no clothes on? While it is true that *gumnos* is used many times to indicate a complete lack of clothing (i.e. nudity), it can also refer to wearing only an undergarment (Job 22:6, cf. Deut 24:12–13) or to being poorly clad (cf. Jam 2:15, also Matt 25:36). Because of this, I understand *gumnos* in v.7 to mean that Peter had taken off his outer garment while fishing to allow for ease of movement, but was still wearing his tunic (*chiton*).⁸ However, I am not dogmatic about this interpretation—it may well be that Peter was wearing only a loincloth or was nude. In either case, we should not take Peter’s actions as being normative or implying that nakedness around the same gender is approved.

- 16) We began this study by emphasizing that the overarching purpose of the Christian life is to please God in everything we do. How does following God’s guidelines for modesty relate to loving God and loving others?
- A) Our bodies are not our own. We are commanded to glorify God in our bodies. Our love for God motivates our concern for His glory, which in turn motivates us to dress in a God-glorifying manner. Paul tells us in our main text that what we choose to wear either reinforces or contradicts our claim to godliness.
- (1) “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:19–20).
- B) Doing what pleases God is beneficial to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Modest dress promotes pure minds and chaste living. It reduces the opportunity the enemy has to attack others through the lusts of the flesh. It also serves as a testimony to the world that God’s people are a holy people and that is what God requires of all men.
- (1) “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you” (1 Thess 4:3–8).

⁸ All the commentators I read on James 2:15 cited John 21:7 as an example of *gumnos* meaning “clad only in a tunic.”