

Throughout history civilizations have morally degenerated, disintegrated, and disappeared. Unbridled sensuality, abandonment of personal responsibility, and humanized religion inevitably bring about the unraveling of society. Man's depravity is the only feasible explanation for the repetition of societal collapses and the atrocities that accompany them.

Man's curious nature also makes modesty mandatory. How many have had their sensual appetites whetted through innocent curiosity? Premature and forbidden knowledge has sidetracked multitudes.

There are two chief reasons this subject needs to be addressed in relation to Christians. Self-esteem, man-centered psychology, and theologically weak pulpits have put question marks in believer's minds about the depravity of man. Second, the restraint of conscience has been debilitated through continual exposure to corrupt media. It started in the 1950's as our nation was stripped of innocence. Rock music and television were two of the chief instruments that robbed us of national character. The Ed Sullivan Show would only show Elvis above the waist because his sensual gyrating was too much for the public at that time. Then came a stripping of authority in the 60's when college campuses erupted into violence and policemen were disgustingly called "pigs." The 70's brought a stripping of love and the latchkey generation was born. Post-modernism began the stripping of hope in the 80's and the "absolutes" of the past have now been discarded. The net result is the contemporary "hostage crisis" wherein Christians have been taken captive to indecency by the relentless assault of declining cultural norms.

Since men are visually stimulated, Christian women must be careful about their dress. You are your brother's keeper! Every child of God has a solemn obligation to never put a "stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" (Ro. 14:13). Paul determined that if eating meat offended his brother he would not eat meat. Men are also responsible, like Job, to make a covenant with their eyes in avoiding the lustful look. Man's nature, weakness, and inquisitiveness call for us to go the extra mile in order to avoid causing a brother to sin.

Application

The case for modesty is clearly mandated by these compelling incentives: the clear command of

Scripture, God's demanding character, the wrath of God, and man's nature. Responsibility is called for on three levels: personal, parental, and pastoral.

First, there is **personal** responsibility before God. The way a person responds to a subject like this says a lot about his view of God, his view of himself, and his regard for others. We know the immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21). Intentional immodesty indicates either an ignorance at best, or an immoral heart at worst. When humility, discretion, and purity clothe the spirit, the body will follow suit and be modestly clothed.

Clothing serves three purposes: covering, protection, and identification. God's people are different in their thinking, being, actions, speech, and dress. Have the courage to buck the trends! Set a high standard and stick to it. I heard of a girl who would only purchase clothes after her father and brothers approved them. Fear God more than man. Seek God's approval rather than man's. Dare to be a non-conformist.

Second, there is **parental** responsibility. God judged Eli because *his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not*. Do not doubt that the Lord held Eli responsible for the wicked behavior of his children. The consequences of his neglect were substantial. His boys were killed, Eli died, and his descendants were cursed.

Sir, do you recall the thoughts you've had toward immodestly dressed girls and women? Do you want men thinking those kinds of thoughts about your daughters and your wife? Men, we must take our shepherding roles seriously because we will give an account to God for the way that we rule our homes.

Third, there is **pastoral** responsibility on the church level. We need clear teaching on this subject. The preaching of Bible principles must be translated into ministry policies, which in turn must be practiced. Direction in a ministry is determined when a pastor is serious enough to see to it that the leadership exemplifies what he preaches. "Huffing and puffing" in the pulpit while failing to implement consistent standards eventually conditions the congregation to understand that the pastor really doesn't mean what he says. Similarly, when Christian schools do not enforce what is written in their handbooks the students see the lack of integrity and lose respect for the administration.

In no way am I suggesting Gestapo-like measures in the local church. However, the pendulum has swung so far from the plumbline that corrective

action must be taken. Instruction, positive examples, and loving confrontation are necessary. One pastor said, "I can't tell you how to conduct yourself at home, but when you come on church premises I do have some input." Since pastors will give account for their flocks, they can and must do all that is in their power to promote godliness and protect their sheep from being defrauded on church property.

Let's end the "Hostage Crisis" by determining right now that we will no longer follow the trends of our decadent culture. In matters of personal holiness, why not shoot on the high side? The church is a Bride, not a harlot. Let's determine to adorn ourselves modestly, both inwardly and outwardly.

— Harold Vaughan

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Modesty

*Incentives to
Restoring Virtue
in the
Local Church*

Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, were “naked and not ashamed.” In this pristine environment there was no reason for them to be ashamed. They were innocent – their natures had not been warped by sin. The first couple was in a state of holy matrimony. It was impossible for them to put a stumbling block before others since they were the only two people alive. They were naked and unashamed, and given the circumstances, there was no reason for them to be ashamed. We also find ourselves living in a day when people are naked (at least partially) and unashamed. However, unlike Eden, there is every reason for shame!

The fashion industry and an immoral culture make it mandatory to address the issue of modesty. The collapse of standards in society at large has filtered down into the churches. I hold no hope for the world in regards to decency, but I do believe parents and pastors can make a BIG difference in Bible-believing churches. Note carefully these four incentives to modesty from Scripture.

The Word of God Commands It

The concept of modesty is not a cultural relative or matter of personal preference. The early church was having problems because some women were living impure and self-centered lives. These women, as the context indicates, were having a negative impact on the public worship service. Paul calls on Timothy to confront the problem. The inspired pen of Paul wrote that women should “*adorn themselves in modest apparel*” (1Tim. 2:9). Young’s Concordance defines modest apparel as *long robe* or *long garment*. The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 made herself “coverings.” When Adam and Eve realized their nakedness they made themselves aprons of fig leaves. But God judged these fig leaves inadequate coverings for their bodies. He then clothed them with tunics (long robes) made out of the skins of animals. When God clothed Eve, He also clothed Adam. The principle of modesty is illustrated in the Old Testament by God Himself making suitable clothing for the first couple and clearly mandated in the New Testament. Note this definition of modesty:

Having a regard for decencies of behavior or dress; quiet and humble in appearance, style, etc.; not displaying one’s body; not boastful; unassuming; retiring; virtuous; not vain; not forward; shy or reserved; chaste.

One Christian camping ministry defined modest apparel by the use of three “L’s”: *long, loose, and lots*. By

contrast, immodest garments are those which are abbreviated, revealing, or seductive. Immodesty could be defined as: dress that draws attention to the body rather than the face; dress that leaves more uncovered than covered; dress that scandalizes others; or personified pornography.

There are two classes of immodest people mentioned in Scripture: harlots and the demon-possessed. Proverbs 7:10 speaks of a “woman with the attire of an harlot.” No attempt is made to describe this attire as it is assumed everybody knows how a prostitute dresses. One preacher, noticing the provocative dress of a young girl at church, said it reminded him of five pounds of sausage in a three-pound bag. He went on to say this girl had on enough paint to paint a battleship and enough powder to blow it up!

In 1960 Mary Quant introduced the mini-skirt. She said she designed it to announce to the world that she was ready to go to bed with a man, day or night. You can identify a streetwalker by the way she dresses. Style of clothing says a lot about a person’s intentions. Harlots advertise their merchandise by their scanty clothing. Plunging necklines, skin-tight body suits, see-through blouses, skirts slit halfway up the thigh, and mini-skirts have no place in a Christian’s closet or on a Christian’s body. The spirit of whoredoms is upon the fashion industry, but we have an obligation to cast this spirit out of our churches.

The other type of immodest person referenced in Scripture is the demon-possessed man found in Luke 8. Here we find a man “which had devils long time, and ware no clothes.” Note three characteristics of this demonized man who spent his days strutting around the cemetery: 1) He was naked – he wore no clothes; 2) He was preoccupied with death – he dwelt in the tombs; 3) He had supernatural strength – he broke the fetters. Do you see any similarities between this man and many Rock musicians?! Oliver B. Greene said, “The spirit of the devil tends to undress people – but the Spirit of God creates within them a desire to be modestly and decently clothed.” Nakedness and demonism go hand-in-hand.

Mark this down: FOLLOWERS OF JESUS, MALE OR FEMALE, WEAR MODEST APPAREL. They dress to draw attention to a radiant face and a clear conscience, not their bodies.

The Character of God Demands It

Another incentive to modesty is God’s personal character. God is holy and demands His people be holy as well. “Be ye holy for I am holy.” Throughout the Old

Testament God’s people were meticulously set apart from the Gentiles. In countless ways His chosen people were distinct from the surrounding pagan cultures. The reason God defined such high standards for Israel was due to His exacting, righteous character. God never conforms Himself to the whims of man; He requires those who follow Him to conform themselves to His ways. Holiness cannot be optional because “*without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*”

God, by His very nature, is exclusive. The Ten Commandments forbid certain attitudes and behaviors. Proverbs is a tribute to the exclusiveness of God. Here we learn the Jewish mind thought in terms of *right/wrong, good/evil, black/white, either/or*. This categorical mindset was in opposition to the *both/and* type of inclusive thinking of the Gentiles. God’s unchanging character and His eternal Law-Word were the plumbline that separated God’s people from the heathen. The personal, private, family, and religious life of the Chosen was meant to accurately reflect the Creator’s unique character. Consequently, God’s people were unmistakably distinct from the pagans.

Even so, we Christians must order our lives and practices based on God’s revelation of Himself. Repeatedly we are warned against conformity to the world system (Romans 12:1-2; 1 John 2:15). We cannot think or conduct ourselves like the *world* and be true servants of Christ. That which is immoral, sensual, demonic, and ungodly must be rejected.

Jacob, who had labored seven long years for Rachel, got the shock of his life when he arose the morning after his wedding night to discover, “Behold, it was Leah!” His father-in-law had deceived him. He thought he had Rachel, but the next day he found out he had married her sister instead. Like Jacob, we can be deceived into accepting things under false pretense and making the discovery only after it is too late. Our bodies are “living sacrifices.” The question is to which God – the true and living God, or the accommodating god of popular religion?

The Wrath of God Necessitates It

Because God is holy, He must judge sin. When God saw that *the wickedness of man was great in the earth* and his *thoughts were only evil continually*, He sent the Flood and destroyed all except righteous Noah and his family. The Lord rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah because of their great wickedness. Hebrews 13:4 states, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but *whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.*” Clearly, actions have consequences. Moreover, the price tag for immodesty is extremely high.

That classic passage on moral purity found in 1 Thessalonians 4:4-7 gives a solemn warning against defrauding, “*That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.*” The context clearly has to do with the Christian’s body and sexual desire. *Defraud* means to “overreach” or “to stir a desire which cannot righteously be fulfilled.” Immodest dress can stimulate thoughts and desires that are inappropriate. Whenever a person defrauds another person, God Himself has pledged to act as the avenger.

We expect to be scandalized by the media and unsaved people. But no man, young or old, should be defrauded when he attends church. Where are the pastors who will protect their flocks from the unnecessary temptation of immodestly dressed church members? Where are the pastors who fear God more than the inevitable charge of legalism when he sets forth principles of modest dress for those in leadership? Where are the pastors who are willing to teach these principles to his people, especially the fathers? Those who defraud, or condone it through silence, have been forewarned that the “*Lord is the avenger of all such.*”

Don’t get me wrong, I am not suggesting a harsh and scathing approach that needlessly turns people off. What I am recommending is teaching clear, principled reasons for modest dress. The more godless our culture becomes the more it will be necessary to instruct our people in matters of decency and propriety. Let’s face it, those who have been conditioned by the media, pop-music, and the horizontal theology of today are clueless about modesty. Yes, we must meet people where they are, but when they come into church membership and places of leadership we must help them to learn to be exemplary in their deportment. “Be thou an example,” “Avoid the very appearance of evil,” “That no man put a stumblingblock,” and a host of other Scriptures instruct us that Bible principles are not only to be taught and believed, but actually practiced on a individual level and corporate level.

The Nature of Man Calls for It

Modesty is also required because of the man’s innate constitution. With a built-in propensity toward evil because of the Fall, man naturally moves in the direction of sin. Civilizations don’t *give out*, they *give in*.