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## MODEST APPAREL

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# THINKING LIKE A CHRISTIAN ABOUT MODEST APPAREL

Robert G. Spinney

**T**HE Christian's wardrobe is no small matter. The daily statements we make with our clothing—intentional or unintentional, interpreted correctly or incorrectly—are among the boldest statements we make. Our children, siblings, coworkers, classmates, and fellow church members cannot help but see our clothing. Everyone notices if we are sloppy or neat, simple or glamorous, provocative or modest. Clothing can both affect our self-image and shape other peoples' perceptions of us: that is why we spend gobs of money purchasing nice clothing. Thinking Christianly about clothing involves many issues...

**We must first remove two obstacles that sometimes prevent Christians from even considering this subject:** the belief that any discussion of clothing is inherently legalistic and the belief that such discussions are simply unnecessary. In many places today, simply to *raise* the subject of immodest clothing is to set off every legalism alarm in the building. This is regrettable.

We do not understand *holiness* if we think applying Colossians 3:17 (“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus”) to the subject of clothing is somehow wrong. The person who says, “Jesus will not be Lord of my clothing” is little different from the person who says, “Jesus will not be Lord of my money.”

Nor is it legalistic when God's people endeavor to obey God's instructions. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones<sup>1</sup> put it well when he said that if the “grace” we have received does not help us to keep God's laws, then we have not really received grace. To be sure, Christians can handle the subject of immodest clothing in a clumsy, unbiblical, and grace-denying fashion. That *is* a problem. But surely, ignoring the subject is not the solution: by doing this, we imply there is no such thing as inappropriate clothing.

God's people cannot afford to ignore this issue. Why not? Because Christians who think unbiblically about this issue do not naturally gravitate toward more modest clothing. As is true with other aspects of living the Christian life, we never “drift forward.” Holiness and spiritual maturity must be pursued (Heb 12:14). That pursuit of godliness should be marked by diligence (2Pe 1:10; 3:14). Our mind's default settings are not godly: renewing our minds produces spiritual transformation (Rom 12:2).

Sometimes Christians dismiss the issue of modest clothing as *trivial*. It is not. After all, it was God Who noticed the first clothing ever invented, judged it inadequate, and intervened to replace it with apparel of His own making (Gen 3:7, 21). And no one can deny that much of the clothing available in stores today is scandalously immodest. “If you're blind or from another planet,” writes Barbara Hughes, “you may conceivably have missed the fact that modesty has disappeared. It is dead and buried! If you don't think so, go shopping with a teenager.”<sup>2</sup>

**A third issue also deserves attention at the outset of this discussion.** Some God-fearing Christians dress immodestly, even though they have no wish to offend others, flaunt their sexuality, or turn heads with their skimpy apparel. These believers often sincerely *think* they are dressing modestly. The problem? *They take their fashion cues from the world.* They permit the clothing industry and entertainers to define both what is beautiful and what is appropriate apparel. The result? Stylish attire that runs afoul of biblical principles. Clothing that reflects the world's values can be immodest regardless of the wearers' motives. *Innocent motives change nothing:* unintentional immodesty and “immodesty out of ignorance” are still unbiblical immodesty. The Christian might truthfully say, “It is not my intention to dress sensually or seductively,” and yet still dress inappropriately. Surely biblical principles—not worldly fashion designers, movie stars, and celebrities—should set the standards for proper clothing.

To whom is this booklet addressed? I suppose to every reader who wears clothing. However, it seems that we tend to direct messages like this at younger women. This strikes me as inappropriate. The message in this booklet is aimed primarily at husbands and fathers, who are the God-ordained leaders of families.<sup>3</sup> When I see a Christian teenager who is immodestly dressed, my first thought is, “Where is the father? Why is the father asleep at the wheel?” When a married Christian woman does not dress modestly, my first thought is, “Why is the husband so unconcerned with the Bible's

<sup>1</sup> **David Martyn Lloyd-Jones** (1899-1981) – Welsh expository preacher and successor to G. Campbell Morgan as minister of Westminster Chapel, London, England, 1938-68.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Woman* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 92.

<sup>3</sup> **Editor's Note:** and pastors.

teaching regarding modest clothing?” A man has a God-given responsibility to protect his wife and children. Immodest clothing invites the wrong kind of people to pay the wrong kind of attention to our family members. In addition, improper apparel is sometimes a way to express sensuality in an inappropriate (and public) manner. Men, we dare not ignore these matters.

Similarly, a man has a responsibility to protect others from the stumbling blocks that his wife and children may create with their immodest attire. This is true in all places and at all times, but *it is especially true with regard to corporate church meetings*. More than one Christian has asked me, “Why can’t we have at least one safe haven from tight clothing, cleavage, bare shoulders, and short shorts? Why can’t people be sure to dress modestly when they attend church meetings? I expect to be tempted by scandalous clothing when I go to a college campus, but God’s people shouldn’t have to face that kind of temptation at worship services. Can’t Christians be more considerate of others?” That is a legitimate request. Men have an added responsibility: they should explain to their wives and older children how easily men are tempted to lust by immodest clothing. Our families may think that we never battle with sexual temptations. Tell your family the truth! I have spoken with Christian women who simply did not know that Christian men are tempted to sin by immodest clothing. Once they understood, they gladly dressed more modestly.

Has God given us instructions regarding clothing? The answer to this question is *yes*...The inspired Apostle writes in 1 Timothy 2:9, “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array.” Perhaps the most obvious truth in this verse is one that is often denied today: God *does* care about our clothing...In 1 Timothy 2:9, modesty is specifically linked to *how* Christian women adorn themselves with clothing.

Every discussion of modest and immodest clothing at some point asks what could be called The Line Question: Where exactly is the line between acceptable and unacceptable clothing? How do I know where the line is? I will not cross the line, but could you please define precisely where the line exists? The word [*shamefacedness*] addresses The Line Question because the modest Christians say, “I don’t want to get near the line! I may not know exactly where the line is between acceptable and unacceptable clothing, but I know approximately where it is . . . and I will stay away from it.”

The word [*sobriety*]...speaks of exercising restraint over one’s thoughts, preferences, and desires. The discreet Christian does not give free rein to his passions; he knows how to bridle his desires. The Bible is exposing something here that many simply do not want to admit: some use their clothing as non-verbal expressions of their own sensuality. They deliberately turn themselves into an object of lust: they walk into a room with the intention of turning heads. Instead of practicing self-control, they openly flaunt their sensuality with their apparel. Dressing [with sobriety] means we do not express our private sexual desires with our public clothing.

**Why should believers practice self-control when it comes to their apparel?** Indiscreet clothing surely affects others (by tempting them to sin). But both Christians and non-Christians have noticed how clothing affects the wearer as well. “Dress changes the manners,” wrote the French *philosophe* Voltaire,<sup>4</sup> who was no friend of Christianity but nonetheless a shrewd observer of the human condition. The English writer Virginia Woolf<sup>5</sup> agreed: “There is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mold of arm or breast, but they would mold our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking.”

This is one of the intangible aspects of clothing that we have all experienced. Donning a new outfit or dressing sharply imparts a sense of confidence and positive self-esteem. By the same token, racy, provocative, and revealing clothing emboldens us to flaunt our sexuality. Christ’s disciple must exercise self-control over his sexual passions, so he must also exercise self-control over apparel that would “mold his heart, brain, and tongue” in inappropriate directions. A built-in cultural application accompanies this command in 1 Timothy 2:9. Notice the verse’s final words: “not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments.” This instructed Christian women not to imitate the outrageous dress and hairstyles that were commonplace among the Roman nobility. In Paul’s day, some women wove precious gems into their hair to create hairstyles costing the modern equivalent of hundreds and even thousands of dollars. They also wore dazzling clothing that easily cost \$10,000 in today’s money. This was the unofficial uniform for Roman court women, a uniform that was distinctive and attention grabbing. At the same time, these Roman courtesans were notoriously immoral when it came to sexual matters. These women did not dress properly, modestly, and discreetly. Everyone knew that their lives were characterized by sexual impurity. God’s Word says to Christians, “Do not imitate the appearance of these famous and immoral people. No flashiness, gaudiness, extravagance, and flaunting of wealth. No association with these court women of bad reputation. Do not regard these ‘court women’ as your fashion role models.”

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<sup>4</sup> **Voltaire** (1694-1778) – French writer and poet; a leading figure of the Enlightenment.

<sup>5</sup> **Virginia Woolf** (1882-1941) – English author, associated with the Bloomsbury Group that influenced the growth of modernism.

Consider the piercing words of Stephen M. Baugh, who is the professor of Greek and New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary. Baugh applies these final words in 1 Timothy 2:9 to modern readers: “Today, it is the equivalent of warning Christians away from imitation of styles set by promiscuous pop singers or actresses.” That means that if we want to apply this verse practically, Christian women should not imitate the appearances of salacious “Hollywood court women.” The very next verse—1 Timothy 2:10—amplifies the Apostle’s instruction. The Christian woman is to adorn herself not with improper clothing, “but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.” The [word *professing*] is from a Greek word meaning to make a public announcement or to convey a message loudly. Our lives make public announcements. The godly woman’s public announcement must consist of good works, not questionable clothing. What is the public function of a Christian’s good works? Matthew 5:16 says that believers must live in such a manner that men see our good works and therefore glorify our Father Who is in Heaven. Numerous verses state that the Christian’s good deeds are valuable not only for the assistance they bring to men but also for what they demonstrate about God’s glory (1Pe 2:12; 3:1-6; Mat 9:6-8). The implication here is that both good works and improper clothing have a Godward element: one provokes men to praise God while the other encourages men to demean Him. The upshot of 1 Timothy 2:10 is that God’s reputation is at stake in our public professions. God’s glory is more clearly seen when we abound in good works, but it is obscured and misunderstood when we make public announcements with improper clothing...It is not only *your* reputation that is at stake when you wear improper clothing: *God’s* reputation is also at stake.

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## CHRISTIAN MODESTY DEFINED

Jeff Pollard

*“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety.”—1 Timothy 2:9*

**W**HAT is modesty? Like the words *love* and *faith*, we often use the word *modesty* without grasping its Biblical meaning. Modern dictionaries offer definitions such as (1) Having or showing a moderate estimation of one’s own talents, abilities, and value; (2) Having or proceeding from a disinclination<sup>6</sup> to call attention to oneself; retiring or diffident;<sup>7</sup> (3) Reserve or propriety in speech, dress, or behavior; (4) Free from showiness or ostentation;<sup>8</sup> unpretentious; (5) Moderate or limited in size, quantity, or range; not extreme: *a modest price; a newspaper with a modest circulation.*<sup>9</sup>

Noah Webster defines *modesty* as “that lowly temper which accompanies a moderate estimate of one’s own worth and importance.”<sup>10</sup> He adds, “In *females*, modesty has the like character as in males; but the word is used also as synonymous with chastity, or purity of manners. In this sense, modesty results from purity of mind, or from the fear of disgrace and ignominy fortified by education and principle. Unaffected *modesty* is the sweetest charm of female excellence, the richest gem in the diadem<sup>11</sup> of their honor.”

According to these definitions then, modesty is a broad concept not limited to sexual connotation. This state of mind or disposition expresses a humble estimate of one’s self before God. Modesty, like humility, is the opposite of boldness or arrogance. It does not seek to draw attention to itself or to show off in an unseemly way. Webster apparently links chastity with modesty because chastity means “moral purity in thought and conduct.” Moral purity, like humility, will not exhibit sensuality any more than ostentation.

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<sup>6</sup> **disinclination** – an unwillingness to do something.

<sup>7</sup> **retiring or diffident** – reluctant to draw attention to oneself or shy.

<sup>8</sup> **ostentation** – display intended to attract notice or admiration.

<sup>9</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Houghton Mifflin, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Noah Webster, *Noah Webster’s First Edition of An American Dictionary of the English Language* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation for American Christian Education, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> **diadem** – crown.

**Underlying these definitions is a crucial point: modesty is not first an issue of clothing.** It is primarily an issue of the *heart*. If the heart is right with God, it will govern itself in purity coupled with humility and will express itself modestly. Calvin observes, “Yet we must always begin with the dispositions; for where debauchery reigns within, there will be no chastity; and where ambition reigns within, there will be no modesty in the outward dress.”<sup>12</sup> He concludes, “Undoubtedly the dress of a virtuous and godly woman must differ from that of a strumpet...If piety must be testified by works, this profession ought also to be visible in chaste and becoming dress.”<sup>13</sup> This applies not only to corporate worship, but to daily living also. Though it is true that one may dress modestly from a sinful and prideful motive, one cannot knowingly dress lavishly or sensually from a good one. Thus, the purity and humility of a regenerate heart internally must ultimately express itself by modest clothing externally.

**Several words shed light on a Biblical view of modesty.** In 1 Timothy 2:9, the Apostle Paul commands women to “adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety.” George Knight III says that the word translated *modest*<sup>14</sup> has “the general meaning of ‘respectable,’ ‘honorable,’ and when used in reference to women means elsewhere, as here, ‘modest’.”<sup>15</sup> He observes, “Adornment and dress is an area with which women are often concerned and in which there are dangers of immodesty or indiscretion.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, “Paul makes that the focal point of his warning and commands women ‘to adorn themselves’ in keeping with their Christian profession and life.” Hence, modesty is an element of Christian character, and our dress should make the same “profession” that we do. Paul’s directive implies that this is an *especially* dangerous matter for women.

According to Knight, *shamefacedness*<sup>17</sup> denotes “a state of mind or attitude necessary for one to be concerned about modesty and thus to dress modestly.” It means “a moral feeling, *reverence, awe, respect* for the feeling or opinion of others or for one’s own conscience and so *shame, self-respect...sense of honor*.”<sup>18</sup> William Hendriksen says it “indicates a sense of shame, a shrinking from trespassing the boundaries of propriety.”<sup>19</sup> This means that modesty knows the boundaries and desires to stay within them—it does not desire to show off.

Finally, *sobriety*<sup>20</sup> has among its meanings “the general one of ‘good judgment, moderation, self-control,’ which when seen as ‘a feminine virtue’ is understood as ‘decency, chastity’.”<sup>21</sup> Sobriety signifies “a command over bodily passions, a state of self-mastery in the area of the appetite. The basic meaning of the word has different nuances and connotations and represents ‘that habitual inner self-government, with its constant rein on all the passions and desires, which would hinder the temptation to [immodesty] from arising’...in effect, Paul is saying that when such attitudes self-consciously control a woman’s mind, the result is evident in her modest apparel.”<sup>22</sup> Kelly says of shamefacedness and sobriety, “The former, used only here in the N.T., connotes feminine reserve in matters of sex. The latter...basically stands for perfect self-mastery in the physical appetites...As applied to women it too had a definitely sexual nuance.”<sup>23</sup>

What then is Christian modesty? Since modesty possesses a range of meanings, we will draw our definition from the Biblical material: Christian modesty is the inner self-government, rooted in a proper understanding of one’s self before God, which outwardly displays itself in humility and purity from a genuine love for Jesus Christ, rather than in self-glorification or self-advertisement.

I have taken the time to unfold these words a bit because some ministers believe Paul’s words apply only to luxurious, expensive, or gaudy clothing in the worship services of Christ’s church. Their point is that such clothing would “distract” in the worship services. However, they want to stop there and go no further. I whole-heartedly agree that this idea is included, but these men overlook or ignore the sexual aspect that is clearly in Paul’s mind. “While his remarks conform broadly to the conventional diatribe<sup>24</sup> against female extravagance, what is probably foremost in his mind is the impropriety of women exploiting their physical charms on such occasions, and also the emotional disturbance they are liable to cause their male fellow-worshippers.”<sup>25</sup> Knight explains that “the reason for Paul’s prohibition of elaborate hair styles, ornate jewelry, and extremely expensive clothing becomes clear when one reads in the contemporary literature of

<sup>12</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. XXI, “The First Epistle to Timothy” (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1993), 66.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *kosmios*

<sup>15</sup> George W. Knight III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 134.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> αἰδώς

<sup>18</sup> Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 134.

<sup>19</sup> William Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1979), 106.

<sup>20</sup> σωφροσύνη

<sup>21</sup> Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 134.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1960), 66.

<sup>24</sup> *diatribe* – a forceful verbal attack; a discourse directed against some person or work.

<sup>25</sup> Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles*, 66.

the inordinate time, expense, and effort that elaborately braided hair and jewels demanded, not just as ostentatious display, but also as the mode of dress of courtesans<sup>26</sup> and harlots...it is the excess and sensuality that Paul forbids.”<sup>27</sup>

Excess *and* sensuality—both of these bear on modesty. Christian women must self-consciously control their hearts and passions, instead of arraying themselves elaborately, expensively, and/or sensuously. If they are modest, they will not draw attention to themselves in the wrong way. Their clothing will not say “SEX!” or “PRIDE!” or “MONEY!”, but “*pu-ri-ty*,” “*humility*,” and “*moderation*.”

**One more point:** because the immediate context of Paul’s epistle to Timothy regards the Christian’s behavior in church, some claim that Paul limits his discussion to distractions in the church’s worship, *not* principles of dress at all times. Again, I believe this entirely misses Paul’s point. Christ’s church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1Ti 3:15). Therefore, the principles we learn in the worship of God for ordering our lives should ultimately guide our daily living in the presence of God. Can one honestly conclude that a woman should dress modestly in the presence of men and God for corporate worship, only to dress pridefully and sensuously outside of church meetings? Knight’s insight is keen here: “Therefore, Paul’s instructions to women, like the preceding instructions to men, are related to the context of the gathered Christian community but are not restricted to it...women are always to live in accord with their profession of godliness, dressing modestly and discreetly.”<sup>28</sup> We have then a Biblical directive for modest apparel that begins in the context of our corporate worship and that extends from there to our daily living.

Adapted from *Christian Modesty and the Public Undressing of America*,  
available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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## A CRYING SIN OF OUR AGE

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

“*And why take ye thought for raiment?*”—Matthew 6:28

**A**LL care for apparel is not here forbidden. There is a lawful and godly concern, whereby we may labor honestly and in a sober manner for such clothing as is [suitable] for the station of life that Divine providence has allotted us: such as is needful to the health and comfort of our bodies. That which is here prohibited is a carnal and inordinate care for clothing that arises either from distrust and fear of [lacking what is necessary] or from pride and discontentedness with such apparel as is [suitable] and necessary. It is the latter that is one of the crying sins of our age, when there is such a lusting after strange and costly garments, when such vast sums are wasted annually upon outward adornment, when there is such a making of a “god” out of fashion, when maids covet the finery of their mistresses, and when their mistresses waste so much time on the attiring of their bodies that ought to be spent upon more profitable duties. Well may all such seriously face the question, “Why take ye [such] thought for raiment?”

Why, we may well ask, has the pulpit for so long maintained a criminal silence, instead of condemning this flagrant sin? It is not one that only a few are guilty of, but is common to all classes and ages. Preachers were not ignorant that many in their own congregations were spending money they could ill afford in order to “keep up with the latest styles”—styles often imported from countries whose morals are notoriously corrupt. Why, then, has not the pulpit denounced such vanity and extravagance? Was it the fear of man, of becoming unpopular, which restrained them? Was it the sight of their own wives and daughters in silk stockings, fur coats, and expensive hats that hindered them? Alas, only too often *the minister’s family*, instead of setting an example of sobriety, frugality,<sup>29</sup> and modesty, has given a lead to the community in worldliness and wastefulness. The churches have failed lamentably in this matter as in many others.

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<sup>26</sup> **courtesans** – prostitutes, especially those whose clients are wealthy or upper class.

<sup>27</sup> Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 135.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>29</sup> **frugality** – economical in the use of anything.

It may be that some preachers who read this article will be ready to say, “We have something better to do than give our attention to such things, a far more important message to deliver than one relating to the covering worn by the body.” But such a rejoinder will not satisfy God, Who requires His servants to declare all His counsel and to keep back nothing that is profitable. If the Scriptures be read attentively, it will be found that they have not a little to say upon the subject of clothing, from the aprons of fig leaves made by our first parents to the mother of harlots “arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls” of Revelation 17. Has not the Most High said, “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God” (Deu 22:5)? No wonder His wrath is upon us when our streets are becoming filled with [unthinking] women wearing trousers.<sup>30</sup> No wonder so many church houses are being destroyed when their pulpits have so long been unfaithful!

**“And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin” (Mat 6:28).** The scope of these words is wider than appears at first glance. As “raiment” must be taken to include all that is used for the adorning as well as covering of the body, so we are to learn from the “lilies” that which corrects every form of sin we may commit in connection with apparel, not only in distrusting God to supply us with what we need, but also our displeasing Him by setting our affections upon such trifles, by following the evil fashions of the world, or by disregarding His prohibitions. In sending us to learn of the flowers of the field, Christ would humble our proud hearts; for notwithstanding our intelligence, there are many important and valuable lessons to be learned even from these lowly and irrational creatures if only we have ears to hear what they have to say unto us.

**“Consider the lilies of the field.”** This is brought in here to correct that inordinate care and that immoderate lusting that men and women have concerning raiment. It seems to us that part of the force of our Lord’s design here has been generally missed and this through failure to perceive the significance of His following remarks. “Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you?” (Mat 6:30). Thus, though the lily is such a lovely flower, nevertheless it is but “the grass of the field.” Notwithstanding its beauty and delicacy, it belongs to the same order and stands upon the same level as the common grass that withers, dies, and is used (in oriental countries where there is no coal) for fuel. What ground or occasion then has the lily to be proud and vain? None whatever: it is exceedingly frail, it belongs to a very lowly order of creation, its loveliness quickly vanishes, its destiny is but the oven.

In what has just been pointed out, we may discover a forceful reason why we should not be unduly concerned about either our appearance or our raiment. Some are given gracefulness of body and comeliness of feature, which, like the lilies, are much admired by those who behold them. Nevertheless, such people need to be reminded that they come only of the common stock, that they are of the same constitution and subject to the same experiences as their less favored fellows. Physical beauty is but skin deep, and the fairest countenance loses its bloom in a few short years at most. The ravages of disease and the effects of sorrow dim the brightest eye and mar the roundest cheek, and wrinkles will soon crease what before was so attractive. “For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away” (1Pe 1:24), and the grave is the “oven” to which the handsomest equally with the ugliest are hastening.

In view of the brevity of life and fleetingness of physical charm, how groundless and foolish is pride over a handsome body! That beauty upon which we need to fix our hearts and unto which we should devote our energies is “the beauty of holiness” (1Ch 1:29), for it is a beauty that fadeth not away, is not transient<sup>31</sup> and disappointing, is not destroyed in the grave, but endureth for ever. And what is the beauty of holiness? It is the opposite of the hideousness of sin, which is likeness unto the devil. The beauty of holiness consists in conformity unto Him of Whom it is said, “How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!” (Zec 9:17). This is not creature beauty, but Divine beauty! Yet it is imparted to God’s elect, for “the king’s daughter is all glorious within” (Psa 45:13). Oh, how we need to pray, “Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us” (Psa 90:17), then shall we be admired by the holy angels.

Not only does the evanescent<sup>32</sup> beauty of the lily rebuke those who are proud of their physical comeliness, but it also condemns all who make an idol of costly or showy apparel. Alas, such a sorry wretch is fallen man that even when his food is assured (for the present, at any rate) he must perforce harass himself over the matter of clothes—not merely for warmth and comfort, but for display, to gratify a peacock vanity. This gives as much concern to the rich as worrying about food does to the poor. Then, “consider the lilies of the field”: they are indeed clothed with loveliness; yet how fleeting it is, and the oven awaits them! Does your ambition rise no higher than to be like unto them and to share their fate? Oh, heed that word, “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of

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<sup>30</sup> CHAPEL LIBRARY understands that not all will hold the view of the author on this point.

<sup>31</sup> **transient** – lasting a very short time.

<sup>32</sup> **evanescent** – quickly fading or disappearing; vanishing like vapor.

gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1Pe 3:3-4)...

**“They toil not, neither do they spin.”** Here the Savior bids us take note of how free from care the lilies are. They expend no labor in order to earn their clothing, as we have to do. This is proof that God Himself directly provides for them and decks them out so attractively. How forcibly does that fact press upon us the duty of contentment,<sup>33</sup> relying upon God’s gracious providence without distracting care... Though no man under the pretense of relying on God’s providence may live idly, neglecting the ordinary lawful means to procure things honest and needful, yet Christ here gives assurance to all who trust in Him and serve Him that, even though all means should fail them, He will provide things needful for them. If through sickness, injury, or old age we can no longer toil and spin, God will not suffer us to lack sufficient clothing.

**“And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Mat 6:29).** In those words, Christ rebukes that folly of the vain that moves so many to make an idol of personal adornment... It should be pointed out that in making mention of the splendor of Solomon’s royal apparel, He did not condemn the same... Though the Word of God reprehends<sup>34</sup> pride and superfluities<sup>35</sup> in attire, yet it allows unto princes and persons of high office the use of gorgeous and costly raiment...

How senseless it is to be conceited over fine attire and to be so solicitous<sup>36</sup> about our personal appearance! For when we have done everything in our power to make ourselves [brightly colored] and attractive, yet we come far short of the flowers of the field in their glorious array. What cloth or silk is as white as the lily, what purple can equal the violet, what scarlet or crimson is comparable with roses and other flowers of that color? The arts of the workman may indeed do much, yet they cannot equal the beauties of nature. If, then, we cannot [compete] with the herbs of the field that we trample under our feet and cast into the oven, why should we be puffed up with any showiness in our dress?...

Alas, so great is the depravity and perversity of man that he turns into an occasion of feeding his vanity and of self-display what ought to be a ground of humiliation and self-abasement. If we duly considered the proper and principal end of apparel, we should rather be humbled and abased when we put it on, than pleased with our gaudy attire. Clothing for the body is to cover the shame of nakedness that sin brought upon us. It was not ever thus, for of our first parents before the Fall it is written, “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25). Raiment, then, is a covering of our shame, the ensign of our sin, and we have no better reason to be proud of our apparel than the criminal has of his handcuffs or the lunatic of his straitjacket; for as they are badges of wrongdoing or insanity, so apparel is but the badge of our sin.

**“Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”** The array of Solomon must indeed have been magnificent. Possessed of [limitless] wealth, owner of a fleet of ships that brought to him the products of many foreign countries, nothing was lacking to make his court one of outstanding splendor and pomp. No doubt on state occasions, he appeared in the richest and most imposing of clothes, yet deck himself out as finely as he might, he came far short of the beauty of the lilies. Rightly did Matthew Henry point out, “Let us therefore be more ambitious of the wisdom of Solomon in which he was outdone by none—wisdom to do our duty in our place—than the glory of Solomon in which he was outdone by the lilies. Knowledge and grace are the perfection of man, not beauty, much less fine clothes.” To which we would add, let us seek to be “clothed with humility” (1Pe 5:5) rather than lust after peacock feathers.

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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**A.W. Pink (1886-1952):** Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, voluminous author of *Studies in the Scriptures* and many books; born in Nottingham, England.



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<sup>33</sup> See FGB 213, *Contentment*, available from Chapel Library.

<sup>34</sup> **reprehends** – finds fault with.

<sup>35</sup> **superfluities** – excessiveness.

<sup>36</sup> **solicitous** – deeply concerned; extremely attentive.

# SYMPTOMS OF BODILY PRIDE

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

**WISEMAN:** There are two sorts of pride: pride of *spirit* and pride of *body*. The first of these is thus made mention of in the Scriptures. “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD” (Pro 16:5). “An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin” (Pro 21:4). “The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit” (Ecc 7:8). Bodily pride the Scriptures mention. “In that day the Lord will take away the bravery<sup>37</sup> of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls,<sup>38</sup> and their round tires<sup>39</sup> like the moon, The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers,<sup>40</sup> The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets,<sup>41</sup> and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels, The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles,<sup>42</sup> and the wimples,<sup>43</sup> and the crisping pins,<sup>44</sup> The glasses,<sup>45</sup> and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the vails” (Isa 3:18-23). By these expressions, it is evident that there is pride of *body*, as well as pride of *spirit*, and that both are sin, and so abominable to the Lord. But these texts Mr. Badman could never abide to read. They were to him as Micaiah was to Ahab: they never spake good of him, but evil (1Ki 22:6-18).

**ATTENTIVE:** I suppose that it was not Mr. Badman’s case alone to malign<sup>46</sup> those texts that speak against their vices. For I believe that most ungodly men, where the Scriptures are [concerned], have a secret antipathy<sup>47</sup> against those words of God that do most plainly and fully rebuke them for their sins.

**WISE.** That is out of doubt. And by that antipathy, they show that sin and Satan are more welcome to them than are wholesome instructions of life and godliness.

**ATTENT.** Well, but not to go off from our discourse of Mr. Badman, you say he was proud. But will you show me now some symptoms of one that is proud?

**WISE.** Yes, that I will. First, I will show you some symptoms of pride of heart. Pride of heart is seen by outward things, as pride of body in general is a sign of pride of heart; for all proud gestures of the body flow from pride of heart. Therefore Solomon saith, “There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up” (Pro 30:13). And again, there is “that exalteth his gate,” his going (Pro 17:19). Now, these lofty eyes and this exalting of the gate is a sign of a proud heart; for both these actions come from the heart. For out of the heart comes pride in all the visible appearances of it (Mar 7:21-23).

But more particularly, 1. Heart pride is discovered by a stretched-out neck and by mincing<sup>48</sup> as they go. For the wicked, the proud, have a proud neck, a proud foot, a proud tongue, by which this their going is exalted. This is that which makes them look scornfully, speak ruggedly, and carry it huffingly<sup>49</sup> among their neighbors. 2. A proud heart is a persecuting one. “The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor” (Psa 10:2). 3. A prayerless man is a proud man (Psa 10:4). 4. A contentious man is a proud man (Pro 13:10). 5. The disdainful<sup>50</sup> man is a proud man (Psa 119:51). 6. The man that oppresses his neighbor is a proud man (Psa 119:122). 7. He that hearkeneth not to God’s Word with reverence and fear is a proud man (Jer 13:15, 17). 8. And he that calls the proud *happy* is, be sure, a proud man. All these are proud in heart, and this their pride of heart doth thus discover itself (Jer 43:2; Mal 3:15).

As to bodily pride, it is discovered—that is, *something* of it—by all the particulars mentioned before. For though they are said to be symptoms of pride of heart, yet they are symptoms of that pride by their showing of themselves in the body. You know diseases that are within are seen oftentimes by outward and visible signs, yet by these very signs even the outside is defiled also. So all those visible signs of heart pride are signs of bodily pride also.

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<sup>37</sup> **bravery** – splendor; beauty.

<sup>38</sup> **cauls** – headbands.

<sup>39</sup> **round tires** – crescent shaped ornaments.

<sup>40</sup> **mufflers** – veils or scarves.

<sup>41</sup> **tablets** – perfume boxes.

<sup>42</sup> **mantles** – outer tunics.

<sup>43</sup> **wimples** – shawls.

<sup>44</sup> **crisping pins** – instruments for curling hair; the Hebrew can mean “purse.”

<sup>45</sup> **glasses** – hand mirrors.

<sup>46</sup> **malign** – to regard with bitter dislike.

<sup>47</sup> **antipathy** – hostile feeling toward.

<sup>48</sup> **mincing** – to walk in a pretentious way with little steps.

<sup>49</sup> **huffingly** – arrogantly.

<sup>50</sup> **disdainful** – showing contempt or lack of respect.

But to come to more outward signs. The putting on of gold, pearls, and costly array; the plaiting of the hair, the following of fashions, the seeking by gestures to imitate the proud, either by speech, looks, dresses, goings, or other fools' baubles,<sup>51</sup> of which at this time the world is full. All these and many more are signs of a proud heart, so of bodily pride also (1Ti 2:9; 1Pe 3:3-5).

But Mr. Badman would not allow by any means that this should be called *pride*, but rather *neatness*, *handsomeness*, *comeliness*, *cleanliness*, etc. Neither would he allow that following of fashions was anything else, but because he would not be proud, singular, and esteemed fantastical<sup>52</sup> by his neighbors.

**ATTENT.** But I have been told that when some have been rebuked for their pride, they have turned it again upon the brotherhood of those by whom they have been rebuked, saying, "Physician, heal thy friends! Look at home among your brotherhood, even among the wisest of you, and see if you yourselves are clear, even you professors. For who is prouder than you professors? scarcely the devil himself!"

**WISE.** My heart aches at this answer because there is too much cause for it. This very answer would Mr. Badman give his wife when she, as she would sometimes, reprove him for his pride. "We shall have," says he, "great amendments in living now, for the devil is turned a corrector of vice!" "For no sin reigneth more in the world," quoth he, "than pride among professors." And who can contradict him? Let us give the devil his due: the thing is too apparent for any man to deny. And I doubt not but the same answer is ready in the mouths of Mr. Badman's friends; for they may and do see pride display itself in the apparel and carriages of professors—one may say—almost as much as among any people in the land; the more is the pity. Ay, and I fear that even their extravagancies in this hath hardened the heart of many a one, as I perceive it did somewhat the heart of Mr. Badman himself. For my own part, I have seen many myself—and *those church members too*—so decked and bedaubed<sup>53</sup> with their fangles and toys<sup>54</sup> that when they have been at the solemn appointments of God in the way of His worship, I have wondered with what face such painted persons could sit in the place where they were without swooning. But certainly, the holiness of God and the pollution of themselves by sin must need be very far out of the minds of such people, what profession soever they make.

I have read of a whore's forehead, and I have read of Christian shamefacedness (Jer 3:3; 1Ti 2:9). I have read of costly array and of that which becometh women professing godliness—with good works (1Pe 3:1-3). But if I might speak, I know what I know and could say, and yet do no wrong, that which would make some professors stink in their places; but now I forbear (Jer 23:15).

**ATTENT.** Sir, you seem greatly concerned at this, but what if I shall say more? It is whispered that some good ministers have countenanced their people in their light and wanton apparel, yea, have pleaded for their gold and pearls, and costly array, etc.

**WISE.** I know not what they have pleaded for, but it is easily seen that they tolerate, or at leastwise, wink and connive<sup>55</sup> at such things both in their wives and children. And so "from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land" (Jer 23:15). When the hand of the rulers are chief in a trespass, who can keep their people from being drowned in that trespass? (Ezr 9:2).

**ATTENT.** This is a lamentation and must stand for a lamentation.

**WISE.** So it is, and so it must. And I will add, it is a shame, it is a reproach, it is a stumbling block to the blind! For though men be as blind as Mr. Badman himself, yet they can see the foolish lightness that must needs be the bottom of all these apish and wanton extravagancies. But many have their excuses ready, [namely], their parents, their husbands, and their breeding calls for it and the like...But all these will be but the spider's web when the thunder of the Word of the great God shall rattle from heaven against them—as it will at death or judgment. But I wish it might do it before. Alas! These excuses are but bare pretenses: these proud ones love to have it so. I once talked with a maid by way of reproof for her fond and gaudy garment. But she told me, "The tailor would make it so," when alas! Poor, proud girl: she gave order to the tailor so to make it. Many make parents, husbands, and tailors, etc., the blind to others; but their naughty hearts and their giving of way thereto is the original cause of all these evils.

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<sup>51</sup> **baubles** – showy trinkets or ornaments such as would please a child.

<sup>52</sup> **fantastical** – bizarre.

<sup>53</sup> **bedaubed** – covered with showy dress or ornaments in a coarse, tasteless manner.

<sup>54</sup> **fangles and toys** – new fashions and trinkets.

<sup>55</sup> **wink and connive** – shut one's eyes to the faults of.

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**John Bunyan (1628-1688):** English minister and one of the most influential writers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; born at Elstow near Bedford, England.



Get the heart mortified, and that will mortify the clothing.—*Vincent Alsop*

## AVOIDING IMMODEST FASHIONS

**Vincent Alsop (1630-1703)**

*“And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD’S sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king’s children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel.”—Zephaniah 1:8*

**W**HAT distance ought we to keep in following the strange fashions of apparel that come up in the days wherein we live? That the present generation is lamentably intoxicated with novelties and as sadly degenerated from the gravity<sup>56</sup> of some former ages can neither be denied, concealed, defended, nor, I fear, reformed. What is more deplorable, some that wear the livery of a stricter profession<sup>57</sup> are carried away with the vanity. Even “the daughters of Zion” have caught the epidemical infection (Isa 3:16)...Before I can give a direct and distinct answer, I must crave your patience that I may lay down these preliminaries:

Pride will be sure to perplex and entangle the controversy. For seeing a haughty heart will never confine its licentiousness to the narrow rule of God, it must widen the rule and stretch it to its own extravagancies. The lust that scorns to bow its crooked practices to the straight rule will not fail to bend the rule, if possible, to its *own* crooked practices...

The universality of the corruption, like a deluge, has overspread the face of the earth...Pride and profit, glory and gain have their distinct concerns in this controversy. To decry the silver shrines of Diana by which so many craftsmen get their livings must raise a heavy outcry against the opponent (Act 19:23-27)...He must have a very hardy spirit that shall dare to cross the stream or stem the current of a prevailing luxuriandy.<sup>58</sup> So that to have a finger in this debate must engage him in Ishmael’s fate—to have every man’s hand lifted up against him, seeing [that] it is unavoidable that his hand must be set almost against every man (Gen 16:12)...Yet charity will lend us one safe rule—that we impose a severer law upon ourselves and allow a larger indulgence to others. The rule of our own [conduct] should be with the strictest, but that by which we censure others, a little more with the largest...Let us then inquire,

**For what ends does God appoint and nature require apparel?** In the state of innocence and primitive integrity, nakedness was man’s richest clothing. No ornament, no raiment was ever so decent as [when there] was no ornament and no raiment. For as there was then no irregular<sup>59</sup> motion in the soul, so neither was there any in the body that might dye the cheeks with a blush or cover the face with shame. “They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25).

But once they had violated the covenant and broken the law of their Creator, *shame*—the fruit and daughter of sin—seized their souls, and that in respect of God and of each other. The best expedient<sup>60</sup> that their confused and distracted thoughts could pitch upon was to stitch together a few fig leaves to make themselves aprons until God, commiserating<sup>61</sup> their wretched plight, provided better covering, more adequate to the necessity of nature, more comporting<sup>62</sup> with decency, that is, “coats of skin” (Gen 3:7, 21).

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<sup>56</sup> **gravity** – seriousness; dignity.

<sup>57</sup> **livery...profession** – uniform of a person’s servants; metaphorically of those who make the “stricter profession” of being the servants of the Lord Jesus.

<sup>58</sup> **prevailing luxuriandy** – currently popular pleasure.

<sup>59</sup> **irregular** – lawless.

<sup>60</sup> **expedient** – something done to achieve an objective quickly; means to an end.

<sup>61</sup> **commiserating** – expressing compassion for.

<sup>62</sup> **comporting** – agreeable; in accord.

The divine wisdom so admirably contrived that their apparel might serve as a standing memorial of their demerits that they might carry about them the continual conviction of their sin and its deserved punishment. For what less could they infer than that they deserved to die the death that innocent beasts must die to preserve and accommodate their lives? Also, their apparel was to direct their weak faith to the promised Seed, in Whom they might expect a better covering from a greater shame—that of their filthiness in the sight of God; in Him, I say, Whom those beasts probably slain in sacrifice typified...Now God appoints and nature requires apparel

**1. To hide shame and to cover nakedness.** Clothing was given that our first parents and their posterity, in their exile from Paradise, might not become a perpetual “covering of the eyes” and a shame to each other. So it follows that whatever apparel or fashions of apparel either cross<sup>63</sup> or do not comply with this great design of God must be used sinfully. It also follows that as any apparel or fashions of apparel more or less cross or do not comply with this end, they are proportionately more or less sinful.

But our semi-Evites<sup>64</sup>—aware of danger from these conclusions to their [cleavage]<sup>65</sup>—will readily reply that this will be of no great use to decide this controversy because it is not clear what parts of the body God has appointed to cover! Nor is it clear which of them may be uncovered without shame, seeing that some parts, such as the hands, the face, and the feet may be naked without sin to us or offense to others.

To this, I answer that the use of the parts and their designed ends are to be considered in this case. The use of the face is chiefly to distinguish the male from the female and one person from another. The use of the hands is to be instruments for work, business, and all manual operations. To cover or muffle up those parts ordinarily, whose ends and use require them to be uncovered, is to cross God’s ends and design and so is sinful by consequence.

To uncover those parts promiscuously and expose them ordinarily to open view for which there can be no such good ends and uses assigned is sinful...Therefore, all apparel or fashions of apparel that expose those parts to view, of which exposing neither God nor nature have assigned any use, is sinful.

It is true, I confess, our first parents, in that hasty provision that they made for their shame, took care only for aprons. But God—Who had adequate conceptions of their wants and what was necessary to supply them of the rule of decency and what would fully answer it—provided *coats* for them so that the whole body (except as before stated) might be covered and its shame concealed.

**2. Another end of apparel was to defend the body from the ordinary injuries of unseasonable seasons, from the common inconveniences of labor and travel, and from the emergent accidents that might befall them in their pilgrimage.** The fall of man introduced excessive heat and cold spells. Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise to wander and work in a wilderness that was now overgrown with briars, thorns, and thistles, the early fruits of the late curse. Clothes were assigned to them in this exigency<sup>66</sup> for a kind of defensive armor...So whatever modes of apparel do not comply with this gracious end of God in defending our bodies from those inconveniences are sinfully worn and used. It is a horrid cruelty to our frail bodies to expose them to those injuries against which God has provided a remedy, just to gratify pride or to humor our vanity...

**3. To these I may add that when God made man his first suit of apparel, He took measure of him by that employment that He had cut out for him.** Man’s assigned work was labor, not to eat the bread of idleness, but first to earn it by the sweat of his brow. Though at first it was a curse, [this] is by grace converted into a blessing. Accordingly, God so adapted and accommodated his clothes to his body that they might not hinder readiness, expedition, industry, diligence, or perseverance in the works of his particular calling...

**4. There is yet another end of apparel, namely, the adorning of the body.** In this, all our wanton fashionists<sup>67</sup> take sanctuary. Out of that which I may force them, or (so far as is sober and moderate) indulge them, I shall first premise a few observations and then lay down some conclusions. Let these few things be premised:

*Ornaments, strictly taken as distinct from useful garments, do not come under the same appointment of God as necessary clothing.* For, first, it is ordinarily sinful to wear no apparel [in public], but not so to wear no ornaments. Second, the necessity of nature requires one, but no necessity or end of nature requires the other. God’s ends and nature’s occasions may be secured and answered fully without these additional things. Ornaments, then, are...matters of *permission* rather than injunction.

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<sup>63</sup> cross – contradict.

<sup>64</sup> semi-Evites – women who wore apparel that exposed their shoulders or cleavage.

<sup>65</sup> cleavage – the hollow between a woman’s breasts exposed by low cut garments.

<sup>66</sup> exigency – urgent need or necessity.

<sup>67</sup> wanton fashionists – lustful followers of fashion.

Plain, simple apparel—a real ornament to the body—is a sufficient ornament to the body. For if nakedness is our shame, apparel that hides it is...its beautifying and adorning...

*Ornaments are either natural or artificial.* Natural ornaments are such as nature has provided, such as the hair given by God...to the woman to be her glory and her covering (1Co 11:15). Artificial ornaments are such as are the product of ingenuity and witty invention. In these, as God has not been liberal, so man has been very prodigal.<sup>68</sup> Not content with primitive simplicity, he has sought out many inventions<sup>69</sup> (Ecc 7:29).

*It is evident that God allowed the Jews the use of artificial ornaments as distinct from necessary apparel.* “And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me” (Exo 32:2)...Yet there was some difference between the indulgence granted to the male and that to the female. Dr. [Thomas] Fuller observes this from the order and placing of the words “wives, sons, and daughters,”<sup>70</sup> intimating that those sons were in their minority, “under covert parent,”<sup>71</sup> as he explains it in his work, *A Pisgah Sight of Palestine*.<sup>72</sup> This seems to be implied in Isaiah 61:10, where we find indeed the bridegroom’s “ornaments,” but only bride’s “jewels,” as if the masculine sex was restrained to a more manly and grave sort of ornaments, whereas females were allowed a greater degree of finery and gallantry.<sup>73</sup> And when God permitted the Jewish women to borrow from their neighbors jewels of silver and gold, the use was not limited to their sons and daughters, and grown men were not considered (Exo 3:22), which is also evidently inferred from Judges 8:24, where the army conquered by Gideon is said to have worn golden earrings, for they were Ishmaelites. This clearly implies that their golden earrings were an ornament peculiar to the Ishmaelites, and not common to the Israelites.

*Though there might be something typical or symbolic in the jewels worn by the Jewish women (as I conceive there was), yet the use of them was of common right to the females of their nations.* Indeed, they were of ordinary use long before the Jewish polity<sup>74</sup> was settled. “The man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight [a quarter of an ounce], and two bracelets for her [Rebecca] hands of ten shekels weight [five ounces]” (Gen 24:22).

These things premised, I will now lay down these conclusions:

**CONCLUSION 1: Whatever pretends to ornament, which is inconsistent with modesty, gravity, and sobriety and with whatever is according to godliness, is not ornament, but a defilement.** Modesty teaches us not to expose those parts to view that no necessity, no good end or use will justify. Humility teaches us to avoid curiosity<sup>75</sup> in decking a vile body that ere long must be a feast for worms. Good husbandry<sup>76</sup> will teach us not to lay out on the back what should feed the bellies of a poor family. Holiness will teach us not to keep such a stir about the outward man when the inward man is naked. Charity will teach us not to spend superfluously on your own carcass when so many of your Father’s children lack necessary food and raiment. And godly wisdom will teach us not to trifle out those precious minutes between the comb and the glass, between curling hair and painting faces, which should be laid out on and for eternity.

Let me recommend [that] you read 1 Peter 3:2-4: “While they behold your chaste conversation<sup>77</sup> coupled with fear. <sup>3</sup> Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; <sup>4</sup> But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.” From this passage, these things offer themselves to your observation:

1. Plaiting the hair and wearing of gold or golden ornaments are not simply in and of themselves condemned, but only so far as they are either our chief ornament, or as we are too curious,<sup>78</sup> too costly, excessive, or expensive in them. For otherwise, the “putting on of apparel,” which is joined in the same thread and texture of the discourse and sentence, would be condemned also.

2. The rule for regulating these ornaments is that they be visibly consistent with a pure and reverent conduct. I say visibly consistent: it must be such pure and reverent conduct as may be beheld: “While they behold your chaste conversa-

<sup>68</sup> prodigal – recklessly wasteful.

<sup>69</sup> inventions – things originated by a person’s ingenuity; in this case, ornaments, etc.

<sup>70</sup> Earrings were generally worn by Jewish women, as also by their male children, whilst as yet young and under their mother’s command; “Break off the golden ear-rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters” (Exo 32:2). Where, by sons, we understand little boys (therefore hemmed in the text with women on both sides), having their sex as yet scarcely discriminated by their habits. But whether men amongst them wore ear-rings is doubtful, and the negative most probable... (Fuller, *A Pisgah-sight of Palestine*, 533)

<sup>71</sup> covert parent – parental authority.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas Fuller, *A Pisgah-sight of Palestine and the Confines Thereof with the Historie of the Old and New Testament Acted Thereon* (London: William Tegg, 1869).

<sup>73</sup> gallantry – adornment; elegant clothing.

<sup>74</sup> Jewish polity – the nation of Israel.

<sup>75</sup> curiosity – excessive attention given to unimportant matters.

<sup>76</sup> good husbandry – good stewardship or management.

<sup>77</sup> chaste conversation – pure manner of life; hereafter, “pure and reverent conduct.”

<sup>78</sup> curious – careful as to the standard of excellence; precise (in a prideful way).

tion.” That pure vestal<sup>79</sup> fire of chastity that burns upon the altar of a holy heart must flame out and shine in chastity of words, actions, clothing, and adorning. For whenever God commands chastity, He commands whatever may feed and nourish it, manifest and declare it. He forbids whatever may endanger it—wound, weaken, blemish, or impair it.

3. Godly fear must be placed as a severe sentinel to keep strict guard over the heart so that nothing is admitted that may defile our own hearts, nothing steal out what may pollute another’s. We must keep a watch over our own hearts and other men’s eyes. [We must] neither lay a snare for the chastity of another nor a bait for our own. This “pure and reverent conduct” must be coupled with godly fear.

4. Holy fear and godly jealousy will have [plenty of work regarding] the matter of ornament. We must not err in our judgment, as if these outward adornings with gold or plaited hair were of such grand concern, nor err in our practice in an immoderate care and superfluous cost about them.

5. The rule must be that which Peter laid down as a pattern: “For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves” (1Pe 3:5). Note, first, that they must be *holy* women who are the standard of our imitation: not a painting Jezebel, nor a dancing Dinah, nor a flaunting Bernice, but a holy Sarah, a godly Rebecca, and a prudent Abigail. Second, they must be such as were “in the old time,” when pride was pinfeathered,<sup>80</sup> not such as now, since lust grew fledged<sup>81</sup> and highflown; such examples as the old time afforded, when plain cleanliness was counted as abundant elegance; such as the world’s infancy produced, not such as an old, decrepit age recommends to us. Third, they must be such as could trust in God to deliver them from evil because they did not rush themselves into temptation. For it is hardly conceivable how any could trust in God to give them victory [when they] tempt and challenge the combat. How can any expect that divine grace could secure them from being overcome, when they by their enticing attire provoke others to assail their chastity? If, then, “the daughters of Zion” will be the heirs of Abraham’s *faith*, they must approve themselves the followers of Sarah’s *modesty*.

**CONCLUSION 2: Nothing can justly pretend to be a lawful ornament that takes away the distinction that God has put between the two sexes.** That law given in Deuteronomy 22:5 is of moral equity and perpetual obligation: “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.” The Hebrew word translated “that which pertaineth” signifies any “vessel, instrument, utensil, garment, or ornament,” military or civil, used for the discrimination of the sex, according to Henry Ainsworth<sup>82</sup> in his *Annotations on the Pentateuch*...God will therefore have the distinction between the sexes inviolably<sup>83</sup> observed in the outward apparel. This is a fence around the Moral Law to prevent those murders, adulteries, and promiscuous lusts that under those disguises would be more secretly and easily perpetrated...What particular form of apparel shall distinguish the one sex from the other must be determined by the custom of particular countries, provided that those customs do not thwart some general law of God, the rule of decency, the ends of apparel, or the directions of Scripture.

Yet there seems to be some distinctive ornament provided by God so that the difference between the sexes might not be left to the arbitrary customs and desultory humors<sup>84</sup> of men. An example would be the hair of the head and the manner of wearing it, or at least in the beard, which is ordinarily given to one sex and denied to the other. Hence, it seems probably that for women to crop their hair, or for men to nourish it to full length, is a contravention<sup>85</sup> to the discriminating badge and cognizance that the God of nature has bestowed upon them...

**CONCLUSION 3: Nothing ought to be allowed for ornament that crosses the end of all apparel: that of covering nakedness...**But among us, our English ladies will not acknowledge it to be any nakedness, any shame to have their breasts exposed. They pretend that the parts that decency requires to be covered, and in whose nakedness shame lies, are only those which the Apostle called “less honorable” or “uncomely” (1Co 12:23).

To this, I answer, first, that no parts of the body are in themselves “less honorable” or “uncomely.” Second, that the uncovering of any part will be so when no honorable use requires the uncovering. Thus, the prophet calls the uncovering of the locks, of the legs, the thigh the “nakedness” and “shame” of the Babylonians (Isa 47:2-3). Though it is meant of a necessitated nakedness—which may be a reproach, but not a sin—yet, when that is done *voluntarily* which then was done *necessarily*, it will become both the sin *and* the reproach.

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<sup>79</sup> **vestal** – virginal; chaste.

<sup>80</sup> **pinfeathered** – having undeveloped feathers, hence, “in an early stage of development.”

<sup>81</sup> **grew fledged** – developed feathers and fit to fly.

<sup>82</sup> **Henry Ainsworth** (1571-1622) – English Nonconformist minister and scholar.

<sup>83</sup> **inviolably** – sacredly; without violation.

<sup>84</sup> **desultory humors** – irregular, disordered whims or inclinations.

<sup>85</sup> **contravention** – violation.

It is pleaded that what they do is *not* out of pride (to glory in the beauty of the skin), nor out of lust (to inveigle<sup>86</sup> others to become enamored at their beauty), but only to avoid the reproach of a morose singularity,<sup>87</sup> and a little, perhaps, to comply with what has been the vogue among the more genteel<sup>88</sup> and well-bred persons.

To remove this argument, first, it is a branch of holy singularity rather to be sober alone than mad for company. What Christian would not rather choose to lag behind than strain himself to keep pace with a hair-brained age in all its endless and irrational usages? And, second, compliance with a vain, humorsome<sup>89</sup> generation is so far from being an excuse that it is an aggravation of the vanity of the practice.

But these are only the umbrages<sup>90</sup> invented to palliate<sup>91</sup> the extravagance. The persuasive inducements lie much deeper, which, because we cannot in all make a judgment of, we must leave them to the censures of their own consciences. I dare not say that it is to allure or invite customers, though what does the open shop and sign at the door signify but that there is something for sale? Nor shall I tax the practice of ambition to show the fineness, clearness, and beauty of the skin; though, if it were so, I would ask who are concerned, I pray, to know what hue, what color it is of, but either their lawful husbands or their unlawful paramours<sup>92</sup>? In the meantime, it is all too plain that arrogance and impudence have usurped the place and produced the effect of primitive simplicity. Women are now almost naked, *but are not at all ashamed*.

From "What Distance Ought We to Keep, in Following the Strange Fashions of Apparel Which Come Up in the Days Wherein We Live?"  
in *Puritan Sermons 1659-1689*, reprinted by Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers.

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**Vincent Alsop (1630-1703):** English Nonconformist minister; born in Northamptonshire, England.



Modesty and shamefacedness become women at all times, especially in times of public worship. The more of this is mixed with their grace and personage, the more beautiful they are both to God and men.—*John Bunyan*

If you want ornaments, here they are: here are jewels, rings, dresses, and all kinds of ornament. Men and women, ye may dress yourselves up until ye shine like angels. How can you do it? By dressing yourselves out in benevolence, in love to the saints, in honesty and integrity, in uprightness, in godliness, in brotherly-kindness, in charity. These are the ornaments that angels themselves admire, and that even the world will admire; for men must give admiration to the man or the woman who is arrayed in the jewels of a holy life and godly conversation. I beseech you, brethren, "Adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."—*Charles Spurgeon*

## ACCESSORIES TO ADULTERY

Robert G. Spinney

**C**HRISTIANS have long connected immodest clothing to sexual immorality. Amazingly, that is challenged today. The person who points out the link between immorality and revealing clothing is sometimes thought to be expressing only his or her own personal weakness regarding sexual temptations. The wearer of skimpy clothing (and the skimpy clothing itself) is not perceived to be the problem; rather, the problem allegedly rests with the person who protests the skimpy clothing. (This is the same argument that militant feminists have long made, an argument we now hear Christians making: women should be free to wear whatever they want and any resulting problems are due to vulgar men.) This silences appeals for modest clothing: he who makes such appeals is deemed to be shifting the blame for his own lust. Thanks to socially acceptable immodesty, the person who challenges immodesty is accused of having a dirty mind.

But the old confessions and catechisms expose the emptiness of this contention. Long before bikinis, Speedos, short shorts, and strapless dresses, Christians realized the essential connection between sexual immorality and immodest clothing. Their comprehensive application of God's Word regarding sexual purity—and *their serious pursuit of holiness*—

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<sup>86</sup> **inveigle** – seduce; allure.

<sup>87</sup> **morose singularity** – being different from others in an unsocial way in order to stand out.

<sup>88</sup> **genteel** – fashionably elegant; of a social status above common people.

<sup>89</sup> **humorsome** – the state of liking things for no apparent reason; inclined to whims.

<sup>90</sup> **umbrages** – pretenses.

<sup>91</sup> **palliate** – conceal.

<sup>92</sup> **paramours** – lovers.

led them to denounce immodest clothing. The modern claim that no clothing is out-of-bounds for a Christian would have bewildered our spiritual forefathers...

[This article] is an appeal to obey the Seventh Commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exo 20:14). [It] requires the preservation of both our own *and* our neighbor’s sexual purity, a purity that should be displayed in our hearts as well as our behavior. Negatively, the commandment forbids unchaste thoughts, words, and actions. We violate it if our clothing expresses our own sexual lusts, promotes sexual immorality either in ourselves or in others, tacitly<sup>93</sup> (if perhaps unintentionally) sanctions unchastity and lusting, or tempts others to indulge in sexual sins.

**Are you an accessory to adultery?** Our legal system rightly recognizes that both murderers and accessories to murder are lawbreakers. Similarly, both adulterers and accessories to adultery are guilty of breaking God’s Law.

If we wear clothing that encourages lust in someone else, then we are an accessory to lust. That makes us accessories to sin—regardless of our intentions. The Christian cannot say, “I’m not trying to be sexually provocative with my clothing. I have no immoral motives. Therefore, my clothing is modest.” I will go further. As a husband and father, I am the head of my household. When I allow my family members to wear clothing that contributes to someone else’s heart-level adultery, *I am guilty of promoting sin.*

This is one reason why both men *and* women must dress modestly. Men can promote lust in women just as women can promote sexually immoral thoughts in men. God’s Word speaks clearly to the issue of becoming an accessory to sin. The Bible uses the phrase *stumbling block* [or *offenses*] where we usually use the word *accessory*.

**What is a stumbling block?** It is something that entices someone to sin. In Matthew 18:7-9, Jesus said, “Woe unto the world because of offences [*stumbling blocks*]! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire”...In this passage, Jesus is primarily concerned that we examine ourselves and eliminate stumbling blocks that tempt us to sin. But we can also create hindrances and obstacles for other people—and woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! This concept applies to much more than clothing, but it certainly includes clothing.

Notice the extreme metaphors in this passage: Amputate your hand. Cut off your foot. Gouge out your eye. Of course, Jesus is not sanctioning self-mutilation. He is using figurative language to make a point: take drastic action to avoid hurting yourself or others spiritually. Do radical things to make sure obstacles do not hinder your pursuit of the Kingdom of God...Dressing modestly is a relatively small price.

I am stunned when I hear a Christian say, “If my clothing causes Greg to lust, that’s *his* problem.” That attitude is simply unbiblical. It is the same as saying, “I am not responsible for the moral stumbling blocks that I create with my clothing.” To be sure, Greg’s lust *is* his problem and is primarily his problem. But if your clothing makes you an accessory to lust—a *stumbling block*—then the Word of God says it has become your problem also. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself pronounces condemnation upon those people who encourage others to sin: woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! John MacArthur makes this very point in his discussion of 1 Timothy 2:9 and Matthew 18:7-9: “A woman characterized by this attitude [that is, modesty] will dress so as not to be the source of any temptation...A godly woman hates sin so much that she would avoid anything that would engender sin in anyone. Better to be dead than lead another believer into sin!”<sup>94</sup> Why do some Christians dress so as to make themselves “lusting events”? Often it is due to innocent ignorance. Many believers simply do not realize that other Christians are easily tempted to sin by immodest clothing. This is especially true for Christian women: they often do not understand that many Christian men experience great anguish of soul as they fight with sexual temptation. Without intending to, they wear clothing that is a stumbling block. Be mindful that Christian men are saints, not angels! Sisters, please love your brothers enough to avoid tempting them to sin. Margaret Buchanan is right when she writes, “By dressing in a provocative way, girls and women are actually sexually harassing men.” This is true even when there is no deliberate intent to promote sensuality with one’s clothing.

In other cases, however, the problem is not *innocent ignorance*; rather, it is unwillingness to honor God and love our neighbors with our clothing. The Bible declares that the Christian’s body belongs to God, both by creation and by redemption (1Co 6:19-20). Every square inch of a Christian’s life is to be lived under Christ’s Lordship and for God’s glory—and this includes the Christian’s apparel. “I can dress any way I want to” is simply not something a Christian can say.

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<sup>93</sup> **tacitly** – understood or implied without being expressed directly.

<sup>94</sup> John MacArthur, *1 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 80.

Please hear your Lord when He says that drastic action must be taken to minimize temptations and stumbling blocks. This is a command, not a suggestion. (See 1Co 8:9; 10:31-33.) Dressing modestly is simply one result of a godly and unselfish concern for others' well-being.

From *Dressed to Kill*, published by Tulip Publications.



## YOUR CLOTHING REVEALS YOUR HEART

Richard Baxter<sup>95</sup> (1615-1691)

**T**HE care that people have about [clothes],<sup>96</sup> the cost they bestow on superfluities, their desire to go with the highest of their rank, to say nothing of mutable<sup>97</sup> and immodest fashions, do show to what end they use it. I desire these kinds of people to think of these few things that I shall say to them.

**This vanity of apparel is the certain effect of the vanity of your mind.** You openly proclaim yourselves to be persons of a foolish, childish temper<sup>98</sup> and poor understanding: among the most ungodly people, they that have but common wisdom do look upon this vanity of inordinate apparel as quite below them. Therefore, it is commonly taken to be the special sin of women, children, and light-headed, silly, empty men. Those that have no inward worth to commend them to the world are silly souls indeed, if they think any wise folks will take a silken coat instead of it! Wisdom, holiness, and righteousness are the ornaments of man—that is his beauty that beautifieth his soul. Do you think that among wise men fine clothes will go instead of wisdom, virtue, or holiness? You may put as fine clothes upon a fool as upon a wise man; and will that, think you, make him pass for wise? When a gallant<sup>99</sup> came into the shop of Apelles,<sup>100</sup> that famous painter, to have his picture drawn, as long as he stood silent, the apprentices carried themselves reverently to him because he shone in gold and silver lace. But when he began to talk, they perceived that he was a *fool*. They left their reverence and all fell a-laughing at him.

When people see you in an extraordinary garb,<sup>101</sup> you draw their observation towards you; and one asketh, “*Who is yonder that is so fine?*” And another asks, “*Who is yonder?*” And when they perceive that you are more witless and worthless than other folks, they will but laugh at you and despise you. Excess in apparel is the very sign of folly that is hanged out to tell the world what you are, as a sign at an inn-door acquaints the passenger that there he may have entertainment...If I see people inordinately careful of their apparel, I must needs suspect that there is some special cause for it: all is not well where all this care and curiosity are necessary. And what is the deformity that you would hide by this? *Is it that of your mind?*...You tell all that see you that you are empty, silly souls—as plainly as a morris dancer<sup>102</sup> or a stage-player doth tell folks what he is by his attire...

**You also make an open ostentation<sup>103</sup> of pride, lust, or both to all that look upon you.** In other cases, you are careful to hide your sin and take it for a heinous injury if you are but openly told of it and reproved. How then comes it to pass that you are here so forward *yourselves* to make it known that you must carry the signs of it open in the world! Is it not a dishonor to rogues and thieves that have been burnt in the hand or forehead or must ride about with a paper pinned on their backs, declaring their crimes to all that see them, so that everyone may say, “Yonder is a thief, and yonder is a per-

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<sup>95</sup> **Editor's Note:** CHAPEL LIBRARY does not agree with Baxter's views of Christ's atonement and justification. The use of this article is not an endorsement of his other writings.

<sup>96</sup> **Editor's Note:** The author's style of English is sometimes quite difficult for modern readers, even more so than other Puritan writers. The article has undergone more editing than usual in an effort to retain the power of his thought, but increasing its readability.

<sup>97</sup> **mutable** – changing.

<sup>98</sup> **temper** – character.

<sup>99</sup> **gallant** – a man of fashion and pleasure, well-dressed and showy.

<sup>100</sup> **Apelles** (4th century BC) – Greek painter, now known only from written sources, but was highly acclaimed throughout the ancient world.

<sup>101</sup> **extraordinary garb** – exceptional fashions that provoke astonishment or admiration.

<sup>102</sup> **morris dancer** – one who performed a grotesque dance in a fancy costume that had bells attached to it; they usually represented characters from the Robin Hood legend.

<sup>103</sup> **ostentation** – display intended to attract notice or admiration.

jured<sup>104</sup> man”? Is it not much like it for you to carry the badge of pride or lust abroad with you in the open streets and meetings?

Why do you desire to be so fine, neat, or excessively comely? Is it not to draw the eyes and observations of men upon you? And to what end? Is it not to be thought either rich or beautiful or of a handsome person? To what end desire you these thoughts of men? Do you not know that this desire is pride itself? You must needs be somebody, and fain you would be observed and valued! Fain you would be noted to be of the best or highest rank that you can expect to be reckoned of—*what is this but pride?*

I hope you know that pride is the devil’s sin, the firstborn of all iniquity, and that which the God of heaven abhors! It [would be] more credit for you in the eyes of men of wisdom to proclaim yourselves beggars, sots,<sup>105</sup> or idiots than to proclaim your pride! Too oft it shows a pang of *lust* as well as pride, especially in young persons. Few are as forward<sup>106</sup> to this sin as they. This bravery<sup>107</sup> and fineness are but the fruit of a procacious<sup>108</sup> mind: it is plainly a wooing, alluring act. It is not for nothing that they would [eagerly] be eyed and be thought comely or fair in others’ eyes! They want something: you may conjecture *what!* Even married people—if they love their credit<sup>109</sup>—should take heed by such means of drawing suspicion upon themselves.

Sirs, if you are guilty of folly, pride, and lust, your best way is to seek of God an effectual *cure* and to use such means as tend to cure it, not such as tend to cherish it and increase it, as certainly fineness in clothing doth. But if you will not cure it, for shame conceal it. Do not tell everyone that sees you what is in your heart! What would you think of one that should go up and down the street telling all that meet him, “I am a thief” or “I am a fornicator?” Would you not think that he was a compound of foolery and knavery?<sup>110</sup> And how little do you come short of this that write upon your own backs, “Folly, pride, and lust!” or tell them by your apparel, “Take notice of me! I am foolish, proud, and lustful?”

**If you are so silly as to think that bravery is a means of honor, you should withal consider that it is but a shameful begging of honor from those that look upon you, when you show them not anything to purchase or deserve it.** Honor must be forced by desert<sup>111</sup> and worth, not by begging; for that is no honor that is given to the undeserving...Your bravery doth so openly show your desire of esteem and honor that it plainly tells all wise men that you are the *less* worthy of it. For the more a man desireth esteem, the less he deserves it.

You tell the world by your attire that you desire it—even as plainly and foolishly as if you should say to the folks in the streets, “I pray think well of me and take me for a handsome, comely person, and for one that is above the common sort.” Would you not *laugh* at one that should make such a request to you? Why, what do you less when by your attire you beg estimation from them? For what, I pray you, *should* we esteem you? *Is it for your clothes?* Why, I can put a silver lace upon a mawkin<sup>112</sup> or a silken coat on a post or an ass. *Is it for your comely bodies?* Why, a wicked Absalom was beautiful, and the basest harlots have had as much of this as you! A comely body or beautiful face doth oft betray the soul, but *never* saveth it from hell. Your bodies are never the comelier for your dress, whatever they may seem. *Is it for your virtues that you would be esteemed?* Why pride is the greatest enemy to virtue, and as great a deformity to the soul as the pox is to the body. And he that will think you [more honest because of] a new suit or a silver lace doth know as little what honesty is as yourselves. For shame, therefore, give over begging for esteem, at least by such a means as inviteth all wise men to deny your suit.<sup>113</sup> Either let honor come without begging or be without it.

**Consider also that excess of apparel doth quite contradict the end that proud persons do intend it for.** I confess it doth sometimes ensnare a fool and so accomplish the desires of the lustful, but it seldom attaineth the ends of the proud. Their desire is to be [more highly] esteemed, and almost all men do think the [less] of them. Wise men have more wit<sup>114</sup> than to think the tailor can make a *wise* man or woman, or an *honest* man or woman, or a *handsome* man or woman. Good men pity them, lament their folly and vice, and wish them wisdom and humility. In the eyes of a wise and gracious man, a poor self-denying, humble, patient, heavenly Christian is worth a thousand of these painted posts and peacocks. And it so falls out that the ungodly themselves do frustrate the proud person’s expectations. For as covetous men do not like

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<sup>104</sup> **perjured** – guilty of uttering false statement while under an oath to tell the truth.

<sup>105</sup> **sots** – those who stupefy themselves with alcohol; foolish, stupid people.

<sup>106</sup> **forward** – zealous; eager.

<sup>107</sup> **bravery** – showy apparel.

<sup>108</sup> **procacious** – insolent; shameless.

<sup>109</sup> **credit** – reputation.

<sup>110</sup> **compound...knavery** – mix of foolishness and trickery.

<sup>111</sup> **desert** – conduct that deserves reward.

<sup>112</sup> **mawkin** – mop.

<sup>113</sup> **suit** – earnest endeavor to obtain something.

<sup>114</sup> **wit** – good sense; wisdom.

covetousness in another because they would get most themselves, so proud persons like not pride in others because they would not have any to vie<sup>115</sup> with them or overtop<sup>116</sup> them and be looked upon and preferred before them...

Lastly, I beseech you, do not forget what it is that you are so carefully doing, and what those bodies are that you so adorn, are so proud of, and set out to the sight of the world in such bravery. Do you not know yourselves? Is it not a lump of warm and thick clay that you would have men observe and honor? When the soul that you neglect is once gone from them, they will be set out then in another garb. That little space of earth that must receive them must be defiled with their filthiness and corruption, and the dearest of your friends will have no more of your company, nor one smell or sight of you more, if they can choose. There is not a carrion<sup>117</sup> in the ditch that is [more loathsome] than that gallant, painted corpse will be a little after death.

What are you in the mean time? Even bags of filth and living graves in which the carcasses of your fellow-creatures are daily buried and corrupt. There is scarce a day with most of you but some part of a dead carcass is buried in your bodies,<sup>118</sup> in which, as in a filthy grave, they lie and corrupt—part of them turneth into your substance, and the rest is cast out [as dung]. Thus, you walk like painted sepulchers: your fine clothes are the adorned covers of filth, phlegm, and dung. If you did but see what is within the proudest gallant, you would say the *inside* did much differ from the *outside*. It may be a hundred worms [inside, consuming] that beautiful damsel or adorned fool that set out themselves to be admired for their bravery! If a little of the [foulness] within do but turn to the scab or the smallpox, you shall see what a piece it was that was [accustomed] to have all that curious trimming.

Away, then, with these vanities—*be not children all your days!*...Be ashamed that ever you have been guilty of so much dotage,<sup>119</sup> as to think that people should honor you for a borrowed bravery, which you put off at night and on in the morning! O poor deluded dust and worms' meat! Lay by your dotage and know yourselves: look after that which may procure you deserved and perpetual esteem, and see that you make sure of the honor that is of God.

Away with deceitful [and showy] ornaments, and look after the *inward real worth!* Grace is not set out and honored by fine clothes, but clouded, wronged, and dishonored by excess. The inward glory is the real glory! The image of God must needs be the chiefest beauty of man: let *that* shine forth in the holiness of your lives, and you will be honorable indeed.

From "A Treatise of Self-Denial" in *Baxter's Practical Works*, Vol. 3, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria, a ministry of Reformation Heritage Books, [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org).

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Richard Baxter (1615-1691): English Puritan preacher and theologian; born in Rowton, Shropshire, England.



## TOO MUCH, TOO LITTLE, TOO TIGHT

Robert G. Spinney

**C**REATING a list of approved and unapproved clothing is a remedy that can be worse than the disease. I will explain. Sometimes God provides specific Bible commands and then clearly states how they are to be applied. But sometimes God gives principles and expects His people to make prayerful, Spirit-led, and Word-informed applications for themselves. With regard to clothing, God does the second. He does not give us exact wardrobe regulations; instead, He gives us principles. In addition, there is some sense in which cultural values play a role in determining if specific kinds of apparel are proper, modest, and discreet. The Puritan pastor Richard Baxter concluded his strong plea for modest clothing with a needed caution: "Custom and common opinion do put much of the signification upon fashions of apparel."<sup>120</sup> In other words, the standards of modesty are somewhat (but not entirely) determined by cultural context. I am not persuaded that the Apostle Peter dressed immodestly when he was "stripped for work" while fishing (Joh 21:7). John Calvin wrote that, strictly speaking, clothing is an "indifferent matter" that makes it "difficult to assign

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<sup>115</sup> **vie** – be in competition with; rival.

<sup>116</sup> **overtop** – surpass.

<sup>117</sup> **carrion** – dead, rotting flesh.

<sup>118</sup> **but some part...bodies** – eating animal flesh.

<sup>119</sup> **dotage** – folly; stupidity.

<sup>120</sup> Richard Baxter, "The Christian Directory" in *Baxter's Practical Works*, Vol. 1 (Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 394.

a fixed limit, how far we ought to go.”<sup>121</sup>

**Scriptural principles are eternally true; cultural applications may change.** I can tell you with full Scriptural authority that God commands you to dress properly and decently, which means dressing in a manner consistent with God’s command to be holy even as God Himself is holy (1Pe 1:16). God requires you to dress modestly, which means you should not push the limits of moral acceptability when it comes to clothing. You are to dress discreetly, which means you must restrain your fleshly passions when it comes to apparel. You must not tempt others to sin with your clothing. In short, you must bring your wardrobe under the Lordship of Christ. “This at least will be settled beyond all controversy,” said Calvin, in words immediately following his recognition that we must be cautious regarding specific clothing applications, “that everything in dress which is not in accordance with modesty and sobriety must be disapproved.”<sup>122</sup>

As believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit and having minds transformed by the Bible, God calls us to apply these “modesty principles” to our daily living.

Some protest that these non-applied principles are insufficient. However, we should realize that there are several problems with creating specific and mandatory dress codes. To begin with, I suspect that most readers of this [article] affirm (as do I) the doctrine of Scripture’s sufficiency: the Bible is sufficient for *all* things pertaining to life and godliness. Yet that same Bible consistently deals with the issue of modest clothing on the level of principle. The Bible itself does not provide us with a specific dress code. Apparently, the Holy Spirit deemed it not only adequate but best that God’s Word speak to clothing issues on the level of principle. I am reluctant to go beyond what the Holy Spirit has done; I am reluctant to say that God’s principles regarding modesty are insufficient. To be sure, pastors should suggest possible applications of these principles. God’s servants must help God’s people apply God’s Word to real-life situations. I shall make such suggestions below.

Nevertheless, only *God’s* principles are perfect and morally binding, while my personal applications of those principles may be incorrect. God’s Word is infallible, but my applications of His Word are not. Immodest clothing is a problem, but it is also a problem if I go beyond the inspired Word of God and require men to obey my uninspired applications. What follows is an attempt at practical guidance in this area. These are *suggestions*: they are not commandments on the level of “thus saith the Lord.” Do not regard them as extrabiblical rules, but rather as possible applications of biblical principles. Their author is a fallible man, a man who is also a father, husband, and redeemed-but-still-sinful Christian.

**Immodest clothing usually falls into the categories of too much, too little, or too tight.** Too much clothing refers to apparel that is extravagant, flamboyant,<sup>123</sup> or vainglorious.<sup>124</sup> It is clothing that says, “Look at me! I want to be the center of attention!” Such apparel need not be skimpy, but it functions like a siren or spotlight: it causes the wearer to stand out as a promoter of himself or some cause. It is clothing that demands attention or comment. Writing almost 500 years ago, John Calvin diagnosed the root of this problem: “Luxury and immoderate expense [in clothing] arise from a desire to make a display either for the sake of pride or of departure from chastity.”<sup>125</sup> This desire to attract spectators sometimes results in a woman looking like the harlot of Proverbs 7. Perhaps the most obvious examples of *too much* are the clothes worn by entertainment industry celebrities. Such apparel is expensive and visually arresting, and it is usually accented by plenty of flashy jewelry. There is nothing sinful about a sequin or an earring; but at some point, the overall appearance is too loud and dazzling.

Certainly, clothing is too much when it presents a message that can be reasonably perceived as contrary to Christianity. Consider the current Goth fashions, which are becoming so popular they now appear in shopping malls’ specialty shops. Thankfully, Goth clothing is often loose fitting and adequately covers the wearer’s body. But Goth clothing proclaims a message: the Goth subculture is dark, rebellious, morbid, and obsessed with depression and death. Many people understandably make associations between Goth and the occult. Regardless of the wearer’s intentions, Goth clothing sends a message that is at odds with Christianity. Such clothing is *too much*.

What is the opposite of too much? It is clothing that is tasteful but not eye-popping. Such apparel is not a means for displaying wealth or social status. Nor is it slovenly or grubby: appropriate clothing does not make the wearer stand out in a crowd of modestly clothed people, either by overdressing or underdressing. It does not send messages that are potentially harmful to the cause of Christ or that misrepresent Christianity. “Make not too great a matter of your clothing,” wrote Richard Baxter, “Set not your hearts upon it. For that is a worse sign than the excess in itself.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. XXI, “The First Epistle to Timothy” (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1993), 66.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>123</sup> **flamboyant** – noticeable because of bright colors or unusual style.

<sup>124</sup> **vainglorious** – excessively prideful; desirous of attracting the admiration of others.

<sup>125</sup> Calvin, *1 Timothy*, 66.

<sup>126</sup> Baxter, *Directory*, 394.

**Too little clothing refers to clothing that fails to cover the wearer's body.** Simply put, it shows too much skin. For women, this includes unbuttoned blouses or plunging necklines that reveal cleavage. It also includes clothing that bares a woman's shoulders, such as strapless dresses, spaghetti-strap dresses, and halter-tops. Many too little tops today deliberately expose bare skin at a woman's midriff and hips, and they are sometimes worn with too little pants that ride low on the hips. Short shorts and short skirts are likewise too little when they reveal women's thighs. Ditto for sheer see-through blouses that reveal undergarments and the body's outline. Ditto for women's "exercise tops" that are little more than bras worn in public. In the words of one man (as he considered current trends in apparel), "Never in the history of fashion has so little material been raised so high to reveal so much that needs to be covered so badly."

Some Christian women are surprised to discover that their bare shoulders or exposed thighs frequently trigger lust in men. Christian women think too highly of Christian men; they think we are immune to visually triggered lust. Not so. Sin means that even nice men can have nasty thoughts. If a Christian woman could read the minds of all the men as she walks into the church sanctuary with her bare shoulders or cleavage on display, she would never wear such clothing again. But most Christian men are afraid to admit publicly that it takes very little skin to tempt them to sin. They say nothing, and Christian women assume they are not lusting.

**Men can wear too little as well.** Several women once told me of a small-group Bible study that was scandalized by an indiscreet man and his too-short short pants. The participants' chairs were organized in a circle, and this clueless brother routinely wore extremely short and baggy shorts. Unbeknownst to him, he frequently exposed himself. The women often resigned themselves to concentrating not on the Bible study material but rather on looking away from this Christian man who was wearing too little.

The most obvious example of too little? Bathing suits.<sup>127</sup> A man would never walk through the shopping mall wearing only underwear, and a woman would never go to a restaurant wearing only her undergarments. However, we routinely expose our bodies like this with our skimpy bathing suits. We have no good reason for thinking that partial nudity is acceptable at the pool or beach...In addition, a surprising number of Christian weddings display women in too little dresses. In the name of elegance, bridal parties wear gowns that expose shoulders, reveal cleavage, and bare backs. We only used to see the "blushing bride" at weddings; now we see many at weddings blush as they witness immodestly dressed women in the ceremony.

**Too tight refers to body-hugging clothing that clearly reveals the body's contours.** I suspect that in conservative churches today, this is the most common kind of immodesty. Even today's non-skimpy and non-ostentatious clothing is often skintight, *especially* in the torso. Modesty is not simply covering flesh: it is concealing form. Some Christian women wear skirts in the interest of being modest, but then wear t-shirts or sweaters so tight that their bodies' contours are clearly displayed. This is too tight. Such tops often cling to the woman's torso and hips so that they function as what a previous generation would have called a body suit or a leotard. Christian women must understand that when tight tops reveal the shape of the waist, hips, or bust, men are sorely tempted to lust. One man put it this way: sometimes a woman's clothing is so tight that he can hardly breathe.

Dresses can be too tight as well. It is not true that dresses and skirts never tempt guys to lust: *just ask them*. Tight dresses can be just as scandalous as other kinds of clothing. (They used to be called *slinky* dresses)...Can someone look at you and—thanks to your tight clothing—clearly discern your body's shape? Is the outline of your buttocks obvious? Is the diameter of your thigh clearly displayed? Without much imagination, can someone tell what your body would look like unclothed? If yes, then your clothing is too tight. This kind of too tight clothing is more than just attractive: it is a stumbling block.

Unsure if your clothing is too much, too little, or too tight? Ask a godly individual to evaluate it. You may be surprised at how others see your apparel.

**Beware of the "show me exactly where the line is" fallacy.** Some Christians make the modest clothing issue more difficult than it needs to be. They think they must possess precise criteria whereby they can determine whether any given piece of clothing is modest or immodest. "I must know exactly where the line is," they think. "If I cannot know exactly what distinguishes modest from immodest clothing, then I cannot render any clothing judgments at all."

Thinking like this is logically flawed. It is simply not true that we must know *exactly* where a line is in order to know if something is clearly over the line. I do not know exactly where the U.S.-Canada border exists, but I know that I am clearly located on the U.S. side. I do not know exactly where the line exists between good singing and bad singing, but I know that my daughter is clearly on the good side of the line and I am clearly on the other side of it. In many areas of life, we do not know exactly where lines exist and yet understand their approximate locations...I cannot provide a precise definition of immodest clothing that will enable us to know exactly where the line is between modesty and immod-

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<sup>127</sup> For further study of modesty and swimwear, see *Christian Modesty and the Public Undressing of America*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

esty. But I know immodesty when I see it. In other words, we do not need to know exactly what criteria distinguishes proper from improper clothing. “Modest clothing” and “immodest clothing” are not two clearly defined categories, and it is sometimes unclear whether a specific clothing item falls into one category or the other. A third category exists: clothing that is neither unambiguously modest nor obviously immodest. But the presence of a third “not sure about it” category need not prevent us from concluding that some clothing is undeniably immodest while other clothing is safely consistent with our Christian testimony. As for the questionable clothing that is neither clearly immodest nor clearly modest: recall the word [*shamefacedness*] in 1 Timothy 2:9 means a humble reluctance to trespass the boundaries of what is morally appropriate, a reluctance that makes the believer not bold when it comes to “testing the limits” of right behavior.

From *Dressed to Kill*, published by Tulip Publishing.



Take heed of being Satan’s instrument in putting fire to the corruption of another. Some on purpose do it. Thus the whore perfumes her bed, paints her face. Idolaters, as whorish as the other, set out their temples and altars with superstitious pictures, embellished with all the cost that gold and silver can afford them to bewitch the spectator’s eye. Hence, they are said “to be inflamed with their idols” (Isa 57:5), as much as any lover with his minion in her whorish dress. And the drunkard—he enkindles his neighbor’s lust, “putting the bottle to him” (Hab 2:15). Oh! What a base work are these men employed about! By the law, it is death for any willfully to set fire on his neighbor’s house: what then deserve they that set fire on the souls of men, and that no less than hell-fire? But it is possible thou mayest do it unawares by a less matter than thou dreamest on. A silly child playing with a lighted straw may set a house on fire, which many wise men cannot quench. And truly, Satan may use thy folly and carelessness to kindle lust in another’s heart. Perhaps an idle, light speech drops from thy month, and thou meanest no great hurt; but a gust of temptation may carry this spark into thy friend’s bosom and kindle a sad fire there. Wanton attire, perhaps [cleavage] and shoulders, which we will suppose thou wearest with a chaste heart and only because it is the fashion, yet may ensnare another’s eye. Paul “would not eat flesh while the world stood, if it made his brother to offend” (1Co 8:13). And canst thou dote on a foolish dress and immodest fashion, whereby many may offend, still to wear it? The soul, then, of thy brother is more to be valued surely than an idle fashion of thy raiment.—*William Gurnall*

Costly apparel is like a prancing steed: he who will follow it too closely may have his brains knocked out for his folly or rather his empty skull shattered, for the brains have probably gone long before.—*Vincent Alsop*

Look into the Gospel wardrobe. Christ has provided complete apparel to clothe you, as well as complete armor to defend you; and He commands you to put on both.—*Vincent Alsop*

## OUR ROYAL APPAREL

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

*“And whom he justified, them he also glorified.”—Romans 8:30*

**L**ET us begin...by considering what it is to be justified. If you wish for an answer in a few words, ask your children who have learned our catechism, and you have it: “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”<sup>128</sup> Perhaps, however, I had better unfold the truth in detail.

You will perceive by reading the connection and by a moment’s reflection that the justification here meant is an act of God passed upon a person needing it, consequently passed upon a person who could not justify himself. [This is] a person naturally guilty of sin, being in a state of condemnation naturally, and needing to be lifted out of it by an act of justification of a divine order...Justification is an act of grace passed upon a sinner, upon one who has transgressed the Law and cannot be justified by it. He, therefore, needs [justification] in another way—a way out of his own reach, above his own doings, and coming as in the text from God Himself. For it says, “He justifies”...

Oh, sinner! However black thy sins may have been, thou mayest yet be justified. Though thy sins be as scarlet, they may yet be as wool. Though thou be red like crimson, thou mayest be white as snow (Isa 1:18). It is written, “[He] justifieth the ungodly” (Rom 4:5). Yes, the ungodly, such as thou hast been. Christ as a physician came not into the world for those who are whole, but for those who are sick. Justification is an act of grace that looks out for a sinner upon whom to exercise itself. May the eyes of grace find thee out [today], poor transgressor, and [declare thee righteous].

<sup>128</sup> *Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 32, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

**In the next place, justification is the result of sovereign grace and of sovereign grace alone.** We are told, “By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal 2:16). And again, “Justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). I cannot *earn* justification. Nothing that I can ever do can merit justification at the hands of God. I have so offended that all that is due to me is God’s wrath, and that *forever*. If I shall ever be accounted just, it must be because God wills to make me just. It must be because out of His divine compassion, and for no other reason whatever, He looks upon me in my sin and misery, lifts me up from the dunghill of my ruin, and determines to wrap me about with *the royal apparel of a righteousness* that He has prepared. There is no justification, then, as an act of merit...Justification now comes as a priceless boon<sup>129</sup> from the liberal hand of God’s grace.

**Justification has for its matter and means the righteousness of Jesus Christ, set forth in His vicarious<sup>130</sup> obedience both in life and death.** Certain modern heretics, who ought to have known better, have denied this; and because of ignorance, some in older times said that there was no such thing as the imputed righteousness<sup>131</sup> of Jesus Christ. He who denies this, perhaps unconsciously, cuts at the root of the Gospel system. I believe that this doctrine is involved in the whole system of substitution<sup>132</sup> and satisfaction; and we all know that substitution and a vicarious sacrifice are the very marrow of the Gospel of Christ.

The Law, like the God from Whom it came, is absolutely immutable and can be satisfied by nothing else than a complete and perfect righteousness, at once suffering the penalty for guilt incurred already, and working out obedience to the precept that still binds those upon whom penalty has passed. This was rendered by the Lord Jesus as the representative of His chosen and is the sole legal ground for the justification of the elect. As for me, I can never doubt that Christ’s righteousness is mine, when I find that Christ Himself and all that He has belongs to me. If I find that He gives me everything, surely He gives me His righteousness among the rest.

What am I to do with that if not to wear it? Am I to lay it by in a wardrobe and not put it on? Well, sirs, let others wear what they will: *my soul rejoices in the royal apparel*. For me, the term “the Lord our righteousness” is significant and has a weight of meaning. Jesus Christ shall be my righteousness so long as I read the language of the Apostle, “Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1Co 1:30). My dear brethren, do not doubt the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, whatever cavilers<sup>133</sup> may say. Remember that you must have a righteousness. The Law requires this. I do not read that the Law made with our first parents required suffering: it did demand it as a penalty after its breach. But the righteousness of the Law required not suffering, but obedience. Suffering would not release us from the duty of obeying. Lost souls in hell are still under the Law, and their woes and pangs if completely endured would never justify them. Obedience, and obedience alone, can justify. Where can we have it but in Jesus our Substitute?

Christ comes to *magnify* the Law: how does He do it but by obedience? If I am to enter into life by the keeping of the commandments, as the Lord tells me in the nineteenth chapter of Matthew and the seventeenth verse, how can I except by Christ having kept them? And how can He have kept the Law except by obedience to its commands? The promises in the Word of God are not made to suffering; they are made to obedience. Consequently, Christ’s sufferings, though they may remove the penalty, do not alone make me the inheritor of the promise. “If thou wilt enter into life,” said Christ, “keep the commandments” (Mat 19:17). It is only Christ’s keeping the commandments that entitles me to enter life. “The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness’ sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable” (Isa 42:21). I do not enter into life by virtue of His sufferings—those deliver me from death, those purge me from filthiness; but entering the enjoyments of the life eternal must be the result of obedience. As it cannot be the result of mine, it is the result of His, which is imputed to me. We find the Apostle Paul putting Christ’s obedience in contrast to the disobedience of Adam: “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom 5:19). Now this is not Christ’s death merely, but Christ’s active obedience, which is meant here: it is by *this* that we are [declared] righteous...For despite all the outcry of modern times against that doctrine, it is written in heaven and is a sure and precious truth to be received by all the faithful: we are justified by faith through the righteousness of Christ Jesus imputed to us. See what Christ has done in His living and in His dying, His acts becoming our acts and His righteousness being imputed to us, so that we are rewarded as if we were righteous, while He was punished as though He had been guilty.

**This justification, then, comes to sinners as an act of pure grace, the foundation of it being Christ’s righteousness.** The practical way of its application is by faith. The sinner believeth God and believeth that Christ is sent of God. [He] takes Christ Jesus to be his only confidence and trust; and by that act, he becomes a justified soul. It is not by repenting

<sup>129</sup> **boon** – gift.

<sup>130</sup> **vicarious** – done by one person as a substitute for another.

<sup>131</sup> See FGB 191, *Imputed Righteousness*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>132</sup> See FGB 207, *Substitution*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>133</sup> **cavilers** – those who raise annoying petty objections.

that we are justified, but by *believing*; it is not by deep experience of the guilt of sin; it is not by bitter pangs and throes under the temptations of Satan; it is not by mortification of the body, nor by the renunciation of self; all these are good, but the act that justifieth is a look at Christ. We, having nothing, being nothing, boasting of nothing, but being utterly emptied, do look to Him Whose wounds stream with the life-giving blood. As we look to Him, we live and are justified by His life. There is life in a look at the crucified One—life in the sense of justification. He, who a minute before was in himself a condemned criminal fit only to be taken to the place from whence he came and to suffer divine wrath, is at once by an act of faith made an heir of God, joint heir with Jesus Christ, taken from the place of condemnation and put into the place of acceptance, so that now he dreads no more the wrath of God! The curse of God *cannot* touch him, for Christ was made a curse for him; as it is written, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Gal 3:13).

**Now concerning this great mercy of justification, let us say that it is instantaneous...** The dying thief was as clean one moment after he had trusted in Christ as he was when he was with Christ in Paradise. Justification in heaven is not more complete than it is on earth. Nay, listen to me...Justification never alters in a child of God. God pronounces him guiltless, and guiltless he is. Jehovah justifies him, and neither his holiness can improve his righteousness nor his sins diminish it. He stands in Christ Jesus, the same yesterday, today, and forever, as accepted one moment as at another moment, as sure of eternal life at one instant as at another. Oh, how blessed is this truth: justified in a moment, and justified completely!

From a sermon delivered on Sunday morning, April 30, 1865,  
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

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**Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892):** influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.



Another thing that bespeaks a man or woman inclining to wantonness and uncleanness is adorning themselves in light and wanton apparel. The attire of a harlot is too frequently in our day the attire of professors—a vile thing that argueth much wantonness and vileness of affections.—*John Bunyan*

## A RETURN TO MODEST APPAREL

Jeff Pollard

*“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body,  
and in your spirit, which are God’s.”—1 Corinthians 6:20*

**V**INCENT Alsop observed, “That the present generation is lamentably intoxicated with novelties and as sadly degenerated from the gravity of former ages can neither be denied, nor concealed, nor defended nor, I fear, reformed...even ‘the daughters of Zion’ have caught the epidemical infection.” Likewise, an epidemic of immodesty infects our churches today. The principles by which most swimwear fails the modesty test should be applied to everything we wear. We need to realize that some “coverings” do not really cover: tight clothing brings out the “body underneath” in the same way swimwear does. While we must not be ashamed of the body itself as if it were an evil thing, we must properly cover it to preserve chastity of mind and spirit, especially in the corporate worship of our holy God. Above all, we men must learn how to govern our hearts and eyes as well as to teach our wives and children the proper principles of modesty. Although women are vulnerable to wearing lavish or sensual apparel, their fathers and husbands are ultimately responsible for what the women in their homes wear. Christian men and women need to study this matter and fervently pray about it, for we truly need a return to a Biblical modesty.

Why do we dress the way we do? John Bunyan put the question this way: “Why are they for going with their...naked shoulders, and paps hanging out like a cow’s bag? Why are they for painting their faces, for stretching out their neck, and for putting of themselves unto all the formalities which proud fancy leads them to? Is it because they would honor God? Because they would adorn the Gospel? Because they would beautify religion, and make sinners to fall in love with their own salvation? No, no, it is rather to please their lusts...I believe also that Satan has drawn more into the sin of

uncleanness by the spangling<sup>134</sup> show of fine clothes than he could possibly have drawn unto it without them. I wonder what it was that of old was called the attire of a harlot: certainly it could not be more bewitching and tempting than are the garments of many professors this day.” The same could be said today, dear reader. Examine your own heart. Why *do* you dress the way you do?

The cry of the Satanist is “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.” The cry of the 60s was “Do your own thing!” The cry of the Feminists is “It’s my body, and I’ll do what I want.” The cry of the modern Evangelical is “It’s my liberty, and I’ll do what I want.” Nevertheless, the declaration of Scripture is this: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1Co 6:19-20). You are not your own, if you are a Christian. Your whole being—body and soul—is the purchased property of Jesus Christ; and the price paid for your body was the breaking of His: “This is my body, which is broken for you” (1Co 11:24; Mat 26:26). Your body belongs to Him! He redeemed it with His precious blood on the cross of Calvary. We must consider how we adorn His blood-bought property.

No doubt, some will cry at this point, “Ahhh! But this is legalism!” It is not legalism to urge God’s children to cover themselves because modesty is the command of Scripture. The desire of the regenerate heart is to honor the Lord Jesus and to do whatever brings Him glory by keeping His commandments. “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me...He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings” (Joh 14:21, 24). The glory of God and love for Christ should be the primary motives for everything we say, do, and think, which includes what we wear.

I have given you the Scriptures, and...I trust that these [articles] have provoked you to thought, as well as to love and good works. However, as mentioned above, if you find the definition of modesty inaccurate or the conclusions in [these articles] unbiblical, then wrestle and pray until the Lord gives you something better. But pray! For the love of Christ, pray! It is never legalism to call God’s children to obey Him according to His Word!

Pray meditating on the very eternal purpose of Almighty God: “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29). This earth, this whole universe exists for one reason alone: the God of grace intended to save His people from their sins and make them like His holy Son, Jesus Christ. He poured out His blood on the Cross of Calvary to pay the debt for the sins of His people. By faith in Him alone, their sins are pardoned for all eternity. Christ saves them, cleanses them, and makes them like Himself. And what is He like? “Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb 7:26).

So then, how shall we properly govern ourselves with regard to this difficult issue? Let us consider these principles: 1) The glory of God must be our primary aim—“glorify God in your body” (1Co 6:20); “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17). 2) Love for Christ must be our motive: “We love Him because He first loved us” (1Jo 4:19). 3) Remembering that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit and that we are not our own must be our corrective. “Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you...and ye are not your own” (1Co 6:19). 4) Love for others, the preservation of purity in them and us, and the desire not to provoke them to lust will be our resulting aim. “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10).

May the God of mercy grant us repentance where we have sinned in this matter. Be honest with yourselves and your God, dear reader. Have you ever really given this issue serious consideration? Have any of you fervently asked the Lord how a holy child of God ought to dress? If not, I urge you to do so with all my heart. Repent of whatever worldliness you find in your hearts. Repent if you dress for the gazes of men and not for the glory of God.

Today many are again valiantly holding forth the Gospel of God’s sovereign grace; they are plainly declaring in many quarters the glorious truth of salvation by faith alone through Christ alone. These wonderful, transforming truths should produce a holy, humble, and modest people, distinguishable from this lost and dying world. Hence, my fervent prayer is that we ardently love Jesus Christ and one another, that we strive together for the unity of the faith, and that we lead lives that magnify the saving grace of our blessed Redeemer. May we live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Ti 2:11-14); and may we never deny these precious truths that we love by clinging to the forms and fashions of this present evil world and its sinful nakedness. Let us glorify God in our bodies, and in our spirits, which are His (1Co 6:20). And for God’s glory and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, let us return to Christian modesty.

Adapted from *Christian Modesty and the Public Undressing of America*,  
published and available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



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<sup>134</sup> spangling – sparkling.