

## **Adornment and Modesty**

### **1 Tim. 2:9-10, Prov. 31:25**

#### **Introduction**

Modesty is a touchy subject, often difficult and confusing to discuss. However, the church should be engaged in it, charitably, and without fear. Christians should not be afraid to talk about clothing and sex (i.e., much of the conversation about modesty). This is our territory. Biblically minded Christians are the only people who value sex and the glories of men and women as God intended them. But we swim in a torrent of sexual confusion.

#### **The Text**

One of Paul's primary aims in this first letter to Timothy was to instruct him how he ought to conduct himself (and teach others to conduct themselves) within the church (1 Tim. 3:15). In our passage, Paul says that he desires (as an apostle – vs. 7-8) that Christian women adorn themselves with modest apparel. The word translated modest means “respectable, honorable, appropriate,” and a good definition of the English word in this context would be “proceeding from a disinclination to call attention to oneself,” or “free from showiness or ostentation.”<sup>1</sup> Paul further describes this as “with propriety (appropriate reverence, honor, and shame) and moderation (sober-mindedness, self-control).” Paul then sets two examples of adornment at odds. On the one hand are ostentatious ornaments, and on the other are good works.

Some commentators note that Paul clearly has sexuality in mind here (Pollard, 20). Paul's concern is not primarily about gold or pearls or braids, but rather the showy and attention-grabbing (including sexually) dress of the world that women are drawn to. Of course, while Paul's immediate context is the gathering of the church, it is not limited to that. It makes no sense to say that women must dress modestly before God and men in the worship service, but anywhere else it doesn't matter. In thinking this way, we separate God as Lord of the worship service from the God who is over all things and all times (Col. 3:17). Jesus is Lord at church and at the beach.

#### **Strength and Honor**

Prov. 31:25 says of the virtuous woman that “strength and honor are her clothing.” Is this descriptive of a woman out displaying her underwear and flaunting her private areas in public? The world might say that such a woman is strong. She knows herself and is individualistic and confident. The world might say that such a woman is honorable. She is not ashamed of her body or shamed by the pastors who get up in the pulpit and say she is immodest. This is what the world would say. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you might prove what is that the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). A woman's beauty is really one of her strengths, but when she dresses this way, she weaponizes it instead of building a faithful home and culture with it. God calls His daughters to adorn themselves modestly, without ostentation. It is not strength to bind yourself to the lusts of the world which are passing away (1 John 2:15-17). It is not honor to flaunt what should be covered (1 Cor. 12:23).

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<sup>1</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Third Ed., 1992.

Women are created by God to be the glory of man (1 Cor. 11:7). A Christian woman's strength and honor is not found in her clothing and her public display of her body. She is industrious, hard-working, productive, creative, adorning her husband's home, clothing her family, providing for others. She is a picture of what the Church is to be and the kind of nurturing, cultivating impact the Church is to have on the world. This will work its way out in the variety of ways that she adorns herself. If we have trouble seeing the glory and beauty of women biblically, it may be because it is hard work to swim upstream, and we haven't striven for very long. In this, we are like a flabby man confused that he doesn't feel the benefits of fitness. He runs for a day or two and then gives up. No results after two exhausting runs. It's hard work. And he hurts the next day.

### **Adornment and Beauty**

Paul does not tell the women to cover up in an unidentifiable or androgynous or frumpy way. He calls them to adorn themselves. In Is. 61:10 (cf. Rev. 21:2), salvation is compared to the glorious ornaments and jewels of a bridegroom and bride. There is a righteous and commendable way to adorn and display beauty. We are not called to be brown-paper-bag Christians. This requires wisdom and discernment. A woman's beauty on display without discernment is wasted like gold on pig's snout (Prov. 11:22). Discernment comes from believing God's commandments (Ps. 119:66), believing that they are good and lovely. Beauty and adornment done modestly, rightly arranged, are the natural expressions of a heart that loves the Lord and trusts Him.

Much of women's clothing today is designed to draw sexual attention to and display a woman's private areas even if sort of technically covering them. Do not be naïve and think that it is not designed for this. And if you are not naïve (i.e., you understand what it is saying), then why are you wearing it? That is wickedness. A husband or father who permits or asks his wife or daughter to dress immodestly says to the world that he is just fine with all the other men ogling his wife or daughter. This is not godly jealousy (2 Cor. 11:2). It is shameful. There is an appropriate and honorable place for uncovering, but it is not where all the world can see. Christian women are more valuable than that. Peter points to Sarah as an example of how Christian women are to adorn themselves from the inside (1 Pet. 3:3-6). Sarah was a beautiful woman who caught the eye of kings (Gen. 12:11-15, cf. 26:7).

### **Conclusion – The Heart of Modesty**

Modesty fundamentally is not about inches or tightness. It is your faith applied to the way you dress. If your faith is basically just your preference, then that will be reflected in the way you dress. If your faith is in the person of Jesus Christ and grounded on His Word, then that will be reflected in the way you dress. "As a community of saints, we are not looking for a 'dress code' but principles where our theology meets our closets." (Hatcher). Modest dress flows out of the gospel. Women have the opportunity to display the gospel to the world with their adornment. Why do you dress that way? Because Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for the Church and clothed her with His righteousness. She is being prepared to be His Bride. And you get to picture that by being beautifully covered, except in the marriage bed which your husband guards and keeps, where you both are naked and unashamed. The grace of Jesus Christ, and the law of God under that grace, is sweet and good and lovely.