

## My Journey into Modesty

Shalom brothers, I do a lot of writing about the Body of Messiah seeking repentance. I write about areas such as divorce, gender roles, abortion. Yet in many of these areas of repentance, there are powerful factors that make it difficult. Not impossible of course, but difficult. For example, in the restoration of marriage, there is the big issue of getting churches unified on it as well as dealing with remarriages that have already happened. In the area of restoring gender roles, there is the difficulty that many families have already based their future on the finances received from two salaries. And that doesn't mean these things can't change, they must, it just means there are extra obstacles. Yet in one area, there are none of these powerful forces which demand great reserves of faith to overcome and startling sometimes painful changes. That area, that place of repentance without great obstacles, is modesty.

You know, I am a pretty average believer. I make no claims to have powers of faith greater than the ordinary or to have a special anointing regarding garments to wear. Nor do I have more than college education or enormous resources. Yet being decidedly average, I seem to have no problem in shifting my lifestyle to one which embraces holy modesty. It has been some work. It has been a minor expense spread out over time. But it has been consistently easier to accomplish than many people believe or will tell you. If I can do this, I don't see why anyone else cannot. If I can keep a basic standard in my home, I don't see why other husbands and fathers cannot in theirs, or why pastors cannot in their churches. If modesty is a godly pursuit, which we should all agree that it is, then this is one we can immediately begin pursuing without great hardship.

My changeover to respecting modesty started not too long after becoming a believer. It wasn't immediate. In fact, a lot wasn't immediate, because my early faith was not very doctrinal or well informed. However, about the time I learned more about my faith and actually sought to live it, I found a hunger and thirst for holiness in this area. I guess it's that natural "smell the coffee" instinct that new believers have in their relationship with God in Yeshua. What was once far off, or even viewed with fear, is now something intangibly attractive. Beautiful. Holy. My desire and wish for modesty was also strengthened and informed by the fact that much of my early reading about the Bible came from traditional Jewish sources. Sadly, if I had been reading many modern Christian sources, modesty would have been largely ignored, or treated in a very vague way, or at times scorned. Yet in reading from Jewish sources, I came in contact with ideas that take modesty seriously and seek it according to real standards. I have thanked my God many times for that. For He protected me from that modern Church culture which knows little of modesty or scorns it, and He provided me something better instead. Why scorn what is good and beautiful anyway?

I started seeking out real standards soon after that first taste, tellingly about the time I began looking for a wife. Now, nobody really has success looking, since it is only God who provides us a wife, but I was looking nonetheless as well as waiting on God. In the several cases that I met women I took seriously as possible wives, I very quickly let them know I wished them to head the opposite direction from the prevailing culture. When they showed up wearing something meager and disappearing upon their body, I was blunt in asking them to cover up. This was no problem at all, either for myself or for them. True, it didn't yet amount to a very clear standard, but it was an articulation, and an articulation makes a difference.

Not long after that, when I met my wife, as I would say was introduced to her through providence by the Most High, I saw the need for clearer standards of modesty. I also began to see the challenges in it. The most obvious one is where to find clothes which actually cover up the body. Even in looking for the most modest possible wedding dress, we had to concede to getting one which wasn't very. But you learn from things like that, and the fact is, the one we got was better than all of the rest. If I had been as grounded in the subject then as I am today, I probably would have gone to the effort of simply having a more modest one hand made, or even visiting a costume shop. When it comes to seeking something holy, it is worth that extra effort.

In the coming years, my own standard became more set, although I gave acquiring the clothing some time. I decided to accept the traditional neck to ankle standard, and I also accepted a standard for myself, though not quite as high. Since naturally I didn't want to have to buy a new wardrobe overnight, and most others don't want to either, I set deadlines a matter of six months to a year in the future. It wasn't so hard to meet time-wise or financially, and soon we had clothing for my wife which consistently covered the body, albeit not yet the entire arms. Intertwined with modesty, is also gender difference, masculinity and femininity. Likewise with these biblical concerns, I set standards and deadlines, deciding that by a certain Fall, my wife should have all feminine clothing, meaning skirts or dresses. This too was no serious difficulty.

While I had begun my journey with holy modesty overseas in China, which is where my beloved wife is from, we continued it back in the United States, which is my own home country. In the U.S. there are even lower standards than modern China (although much of China's past and some of its ethnic minorities do have fairly good standards). Despite its contemporary love for nudity, what the U.S. has in contrast to China is more than a few traditional Mennonites, so their stores, along with contemporary modesty shops and Muslim shops, became a boon for achieving a real standard. That's a simple and effective piece of advice for anyone who cares for modesty: if you want to have it in your life, you're probably going to have to buy from special shops. That's true primarily for women, since modern stores still sell clothing which covers up most of a man's physique. Secular stores sell extremely little of this for women, especially if you are looking for feminine clothing such as skirts or dresses.

One other element, and challenge in seeking modesty, is the push here and there to accommodate various activities. It's not an unsurpassable challenge, but it demands one think and consider the options in these situations. I allow myself some leeway for sports, for example, and will wear knee length shorts and a tank top for basketball. These clothes are strictly for sports though, which means I change into them shortly before playing sports, and I change out of them about ten or fifteen minutes after finishing, once I've cooled down. In the past a lot of believers would have seen the simple logic in that. Yet today many ask – you mean you change OUT of your sports clothes? Yes I do. Not only are they primarily for sports, but in any other setting would be unnecessarily revealing. This accommodation I allow myself would be more minimal for my wife however. Today some people would see that as unfair. But I don't. Believe it or not, men and women are different creatures. There really is something different about seeing a flash of mechanic Bob's chest, and seeing a flash of a woman's. They're just not the same thing. So any accommodation I allow for the heat or for physical activities for her is more minor than for myself. She would never wear a tank top, for instance.

The final challenge, at least when immersed in a western or westernized culture, is to keep the pursuit of holiness even when close to bodies of water. Yet like with other challenges, this one is not insurmountable. It may involve accepting that you look different or that you stand out. But that's not so hard, is it? It may also involve deciding to get modest swim wear, or not swimming at all. My wife and I, since I have begun setting high standards of modesty at least, do not get into states of undress around water. And really there is no need. I know a lot of people will tell you there is, but there is not. There is no need to be undressed when it is hot. There is no need to be undressed when near bodies of water. No existential need exists. What exists is a large cultural tendency to get undressed. This state is also fairly comfortable, and it facilitates certain activities. However, if we care about modesty then we're more than willing to sacrifice these conveniences. We either get modest swimwear, or we don't swim at all. My current standards for myself around water is 1) if I am not swimming, wearing ordinary modest clothes or 2) if I am swimming, wearing knee-length shorts and a t-shirt. For my wife, it is much the same, except we would need to find more modest swimwear for her if she swims. That may take a tiny bit of work, but I promise you, it will not hurt.

All this changeover to modesty has taken place gradually over about five years, much in the past two or three. I went from someone who cared little or nothing about modesty to someone who lives by a standard. It may not yet be the highest. We're still working on it. But it is a recognized, articulated standard, and it was very little struggle. I say that mostly to encourage you, as so many today think living with standards to be a mysterious and probably difficult task. I also want to point out again, that the area of holy modesty is very intertwined with other important organs in our lives; it is intertwined with our gender roles, intertwined with the activities we do, intertwined with our appearance to the opposite sex, intertwined even with expressing our faith. I also want to encourage you that I am far from the only

believer doing this, and even in this day and age we have good examples. We ought to have examples. One thing I'd recommend if you really don't know what modesty is, looks like or feels like is to put an example up on your own wall. For me, that example is the Amish. They look modest, holy and godly. I think others would agree with that. After being assaulted by pagan images and lewdness in nearly every domain of the secular world, why not just cut out a picture of the Amish, and stick it on your wall. I am serious. The Apostle Paul thought nothing of asking believers to use him as a model for behavior. I think little of asking you, brothers, to use the Amish as a model, a visual image of modesty, especially of its holiness and its beauty. In this world of nakedness and vulgarity, I believe the beauty will resonate in your soul.

Lastly, I realize there are still many people who, after hearing what I've said here, will claim that there are things that make practicing modesty today unreasonable. Yet I'd respond, most or all of these are simply in your head. For example, some will claim that they would seem like a freak to their friends if they kept modest. However, freak is probably much too strong a word, and besides, seeming kind of different should be no problem to us, since compared to telling the world that they need to believe on a murdered Jewish rabbi, it's not very off-putting. Others will reply that keeping modest will make unbelievers less receptive to hearing the Gospel, as it seems too religious and not very fun. Yet this assumes that looking like the world and being a load of fun is a great witness to begin with and leads people to the faith. It just may be the opposite really. It just may be that if you tell people – I cover up my body because of my faith – they will actually respect you, and maybe take more seriously what you have to say. I realize I haven't gotten into every detail of keeping modest in my own life or yours, and I realize I have not offered every piece of advice I could, but I think I have made it clear what I sought from the beginning to show: that there are no real obstacles for us in restoring modest dress in the Body of Messiah. If there are great obstacles, can you explain what they are? And if not, then what's stopping you?