

## Advise on Respecting Modesty in this Fallen Age

Respecting the biblical and common sense virtue of modesty can get you some funny looks in the Body of Messiah today. It can get you ridiculed and called names as well. Moreover, with the surrounding culture soaking in lewdness, nudity and immorality, it can really take some focus, perseverance and planning to even get modesty off its feet in your life. Nevertheless, respecting holy modesty is far from as difficult as you'd think, and once you have it established, helps to provide a further foundation for holy living and establish a one-cloth lifestyle, one without hypocrisy. Please accept my seven points of advice below on establishing modesty:

**1---Remember, the Bible gives specifics.** That's right, the Bible draws some lines when it comes to modesty (and quite a few other things too). It might not in the case of body coverage, but it clearly gives specifics regarding plain appearance. It instructs against braided hair, precious jewels and costly clothing. A lot of people will tell you if you actually give specifics like this about how to be modest, there must be something wrong with you. You must be anti-Christian or a legalist. In fact, the opposite is true. The Bible does not shy away from giving specifics here, and in various other ethical arenas. So when you establish your standard of modesty, feel free to give specifics as well.

**2---Remember, setting standards is good;** we all do it all the time. This is kind of a continuation of the above point, brethren. Many believers who are in cahoots with the naked and immodest modern Church will claim that having standards or rules as such is not in the spirit of the New Covenant; that's especially if they're not specifically in the Bible. However, this claim is clearly hogwash.

If you are a parent like I am, you probably have a bedtime for your children. I do too. But please notice, that nowhere in all of scripture will you find that bedtime. You won't find it anywhere between Genesis 1 and Revelation 22. You just had to draw the line and make it up yourself. Moreover, nowhere in the entirety of scripture does it say a parent **MUST** have a bedtime for their children, you just decided it was a good idea didn't you? Well good. So did I. (although to be honest mine is kind of a bed general-period than a bed time but it's a loose version of the same thing).

You see, believers are free to make applications like this in their lives, as well as use the common sense God gave them to make decisions. Now my parental role to care for my children is in scripture. So is the parental role to teach them and share with them the Word of God. In fact, so is the children's role to respect and obey parents. We are fulfilling our parental role from the Word of God when we make decisions like having a bedtime, whether we find it in scripture or not. So true, isn't it?

The same thing is true for having a standard of modesty. We are fulfilling what is a holy, scriptural practice, but setting the specifics ourselves. We draw lines all the time brother. Don't let anyone tell you, ever, you can't draw lines with modesty. Just take a look around you, and you can see the end result of that philosophy any day of the week. Set standards. And don't let yourself be bullied away from it.

**3---Be prepared to take some time to plan for modest outfits and buy new clothes.** As I mention in my essay *My Journey into Modesty*, choosing to respect holy standards is often a journey, and usually doesn't happen overnight. If you've been going with the culture, even the more subdued end of it, your closet is probably full of things that are absurdly immodest, especially if you're a woman. It can get hard to find anything fit for a Christian to wear these days. Be prepared start planning out modest choices of clothing (after you've set your standard) and be prepared to gradually make an investment in new clothing, bought with the purpose of respecting your new life in Messiah. Be prepared to research shops that sell modest clothing. Be prepared to order online if you have to if none of the stores near you sell anything modest. It sounds like a lot to do at first, but it's simpler and easier than you think. There are many choices for modest ware, from Mennonite, to contemporary to Islamic. If I can do it, you can too. The cost of an altered wardrobe isn't as high as you'd think either, and it's nicely offset if you do the buying over a year or two as we did. One of our favorite shops sells modest dresses for between 30 and 40-something dollars. You can find cheaper elsewhere too.

**4---Be prepared to make it a priority over the culture.** There are going to be nearly constant pressures on you to be immodest, especially if you are young. Hold fast to your path of holiness and recognize its importance and priority. That will mean being prepared to be laughed at if you explain people that you keep modest. It means being prepared to be the one who stands out, who is not bare fleshed when everyone else is. It even means being prepared to be left out of some activities, if you're not permitted to do them if you're not half naked, which may be true of some summer sports and activities.

But why should any of that be great suffering for us? We know the riches of life in Yeshua. We don't need to imitate worldly people or gain their approval. We know the beauty in holiness. We don't need to show off our bodies just to play in this or that sport. It is not a need at all. I hate to use this as an example, but you don't find traditional Muslim women taking off their clothes just because a few westerners pressured them. And good for them. How sad that another religion has more feminine decency, more modesty, and yes more courage and more chutzpa than the children of God. We should be standing firm, brother. We have no one to impress on this earth. If we are going to respect modesty let's respect it above worldly things.

**5---Respect other aspects of modesty.** While I write a lot about respecting modesty in terms of covering our nakedness, there are obviously other elements as well. For example, I could bring up the lack of adornment we are encouraged towards in 1 Timothy 2 as I did at the start of this essay. I could bring up what some of the early Christians taught about modesty, which included instructing the congregation to stay away from painting their faces or from dying their hair. In our home, we stay away from those things too. I mean, why would a child of the light, glowing with inner beauty and holiness, need to cover up their face with anything? But I want to bring up one standard of apparel I've established recently that has been a big help not just in modesty, but in staying away from the immensely worldly and lewd culture. I advise you try this as well. This is the standard of plain apparel; that means we do not wear clothing with pictures, words or symbols on it. This standard has been a great relief to our home.

I realize that not all pictures, words or symbols are evil in themselves, but what they are is often an advertisement for the godless and immoral culture. I think it's a fair question to ask: Why should I want to advertise that culture? Why would I want to promote its slogans, its characters, its pop stars and so on when the large preponderance would amount to promoting paganism? It makes no sense to do that. Do you often see atheists, or pagans, wearing pictures of the biblical patriarchs on their t-shirts to honor them? Do you think atheists or pagans argue over which of the biblical caps is the coolest, the one with Yeshua at the well or the one of the Acts 15 council? And how many of them are sticking their favorite verses from Psalms on their jackets. I'll tell you. Not many. If you can't imagine pagans doing those things, sticking biblical slogans and pictures all over their apparel, why would the children of the light want to stick pagan pictures and promotions on their clothes? One great way to separate yourself then from the tidal flood of the culture, is just avoid its images, words and symbols. Like I say, it's been a gift from God to have this standard in our home, and I recommend it to you.

Moreover, avoiding promotions on clothing is also in the spirit of modesty for another reason: it makes the simple person be the one everyone sees. It doesn't try to impress. It doesn't try to be clever. It doesn't throw out a bumper sticker idea instead of the real godly communication we need to be having. The simple man is the modest man. Therefore, it's in the spirit of modesty to keep our clothing free of pictures and words. It's just us then. Nothing fancy.

**6---Start recognizing the modest as the beautiful.** Start seeing its beauty. In a world where we are conditioned to see the beauty in what is flashy, colorful, sensuous and seductive try letting the Holy Spirit train you to see the beauty in modesty. It is truly there, and richly. Let Him show you the beauty in plainness as well. It's not easy. It can go against our psychology and cultural conditioning, just as letting Him lead us out of temptation can, but the Lord can do a work on us if we let Him. Talk of inner beauty is more than just a cliché. Humble yourself in modesty and in the heart as well and the Lord will let others see the light in you, the light coming out of you, even if they are not spiritual minded people. They will

see it. This is especially true of women, who are more beautiful naturally, and for whom modesty is especially important.

Before I had travelled far into modesty myself, I saw that beauty in modest women, especially Christian ones, who are born again of the Spirit. But I could see it in women of other cultures and faiths as well. I could see it in Orthodox Jewish women, or in Asian women who kept in their traditional culture. I would see pictures of it and wish to myself that this were what we were surrounded by. These days I don't have to look elsewhere though. I can see that beauty in my own wife. I have a picture of holiness right at home, and it is lovely to look at and to be around. No makeup is necessary. No jewelry. Nothing fashionable or sensuous. But I can see the light of Messiah coming out of her.

If you've ever taken photographs, the beauty of holiness might remind you of that special light you get late in the day. Not the light at dusk, but a few hours before, when everything just glistens, especially the green in the landscape. If you've ever taken pictures at the time you know what I mean. The landscape and everything in it glows. It has what my boss calls a patina. That fantasy-like glow is like the mysterious beauty that comes in resting on modesty, both in the heart and the body (our bodies are not inconsequential you know). Perhaps that is what 1 Peter 3 refers to when it speaks of the submissive and modest woman, saying she has the incorruptible beauty of the gentle and quiet spirit which is pleasing to God. That beauty which you and I can find satisfying, God finds satisfying also. It is pleasing to Him.

Remember that when you feel your faith or your appearance is boring. It is anything but. If you have clothed yourself in the beauty of the inner spirit, you don't need to show anything off. You don't need extras. It shines from within you. What an amazing alternative to the fleshy, demonic pop figures we see all around us. It is truly incorruptible.

**7---Your apparel manifests a spiritual truth.** This is another important facet to remember. We speak not of a mere dress code. Apparel is the outward expression of something spiritual, just as the holy Bible reveals. When you have clothing flowing from your body, you are showing a picture of the glorious garments you will wear in the Kingdom, the garments which scripture says are the righteous deeds of the saints. Your clothes represent righteous deeds and that clothing you will wear in eternity. As a covering for your nakedness, they also represent atonement, that covering by Yeshua and His blood, just as the pitch covered the ark and allowed it to float in the seas protected from the water, His blood upon us covers us from sin. Your covering is a picture of that salvation too. Moreover, you are even expressing, I'd even say participating in a reality about God. For God is clothed in light, as the Bible says. He is decked in glory and honor. You participate in that awesome clothing of God when you actually wear

your own. In the language of the Orthodox Church, you might even call that sacramental. What God does in His perfect life spiritually, we do similarly right here in our earthly bodies. That is one more incredible chance for intimacy with Yeshua.

But what about undressing? What spiritual reality does that manifest in the body? Well, according to scriptural language, it manifests your sinfulness. It manifests your guilt. To make a choice to show off the flesh then is a message that says – I am proud of my sin and of my guilt. I love to sin and I plan to keep on doing it. It's surely no surprise that the same secular culture around us that celebrates its immorality every chance it gets also loves to show off as much flesh as it can get away with. It is not ashamed of the gross evil it does. It does not want an atonement. As God is clothed in majesty, it would desire to tear off those clothes and dishonor Him. Why should the children of the light ever want to imitate such a thing? Why would we practice just the same?

## And Finally

Brothers, Almighty God instructs us in modesty. We have no reason to resist. He instructs us in His holy Word, from eternity itself, from our Father of perfect light, truth and love. There is no darkness in Him. We've got no reason to resist. We should be in love with His teachings and anticipate with excitement the mere chance to fulfill them. All good things flow from our Father of Lights.

I hope that after hearing all this you find a newfound depth in modesty. I also hope you find a new excitement about keeping modest as well as more ability to do so. Don't forget, as I said in the beginning, it is good to draw lines and set standards. A neck is a neck, brothers. You'll find it just above the collar bone. An ankle is an ankle. That's just above the feet. Men, draw these lines. Bring them to your homes and to your congregations. If you have the authority, bring them to your workplace also.

That's my advice for respecting modesty in this fallen world. It's not comprehensive but I hope it's rewarding in making a turn-around. Thank you for listening. Peace to you in all things always.