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The Meaning of Modesty

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Introduction

This is a follow up to previous lessons on the need for modest clothing. Immodesty is a significant problem, especially during the summer months. Modesty is inversely proportioned to the heat: as temperatures rise, modesty falls. What does God's word say on this subject?

God Wants Our Clothing to be Modest

God wants our clothing to be modest (1 Tim. 2:9-10). He is not always satisfied with our choices. In their original ignorant and innocent state, the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed (Gen. 2:25). Yet, after eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve realized they were naked and were ashamed (Gen. 3:6-7). Please note that nakedness is not something shameful in the private and personal relationship of a husband and wife (Heb. 13:4). Rather, shame and embarrassment occurs when third parties are present. Adam and Eve were ashamed when God came to visit with them in the cool of the evening (Gen. 3:8-10).

When Adam and Eve realized they were naked, they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings (Gen. 3:7). Some Bible versions say "aprons" (KJV, ASV, RSV), while others read "coverings" (NKJ), "loin coverings" (NAS), or "loincloths" (NRS).

Yet, their original efforts to correct this problem were wholly inadequate. Adam and Eve still felt ashamed at their naked condition even though they had made some effort to cover their bodies (Gen. 3:7, 10).

Moreover, the Lord was not satisfied with their feeble efforts. To correct this deficiency, God gave them modest clothing (Gen. 3:21).

According to the KJV and the ASV, God made "coats of skins" for Adam and Eve and clothed them. The RSV, NASB and NRS say that God made "garments of skins." The NKJ says that He made "tunics of skin, and clothed them."

How were the God-made garments different from the loincloths of Adam and Eve? First of all, animal skins were more permanent than fig leaves. Secondly, they were more effective in covering the body. The concealment afforded by fig leaves was flimsy and faulty, but animal skins provided an opaque, nontransparent covering. Finally, while the fig leaves covered only the generative portions of the body, the tunics that God made covered the body from the shoulders to the knees. In the third chapter of Genesis, God established clothing - specifically, modest clothing - as a permanent institution among men and women.

Clothing that is Too Short

Christians should avoid clothing that is too short. Modest clothing will conceal the thighs.

In addition to their official robes, the Levitical priests wore linen breeches to cover their bare flesh; these garments reached from the loins even to the thighs, i.e., from the waist to the knees (Exod. 28:40-43). Furthermore, the Lord said, "You shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it" (Exod. 20:22-26, esp. vs. 26). In other words, this prohibition ensured that the priests were modest from all angles.

Offering a lamentation over Babylon, the prophet Isaiah said, “Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; Sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans! For you shall no longer be called tender and delicate. Take the millstones and grind meal. Remove your veil, strip off the skirt, uncover the leg, cross the rivers. Your nakedness will be uncovered, your shame also will be exposed; I will take vengeance and will not spare a man” (Isa. 47:1-3).

Thomas defines kethoneth or kuttoneth, translated “coat,” “dress,” “garment(s),” or “tunic(s),” as “a tunic” [Thomas]. BDB say a tunic was the “principal ordinary garment of man and woman.” Tunics were worn next to a person, with long skirts and (sometimes) sleeves constructed of skin or cloth. Gesenius says a tunic was an inner garment next to the skin; also worn by women; generally with sleeves, coming down to the knees, rarely to the ankles. Holladay says it was a “long shirt-like (under-) garment” of linen or skins, worn by both men, women and priests.

Clothing that is Too Tight

Christians should avoid clothing that is too tight. Modest clothing will conceal the hips.

Consider the humiliation subjected upon David’s ambassadors by Hanun of Moab, who took David’s servants and shaved off half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle as far as their hips, and sent them away (2 Sam. 10:1-5). Some clothing is too short, exposing the thigh and even the hips; other clothing is too tight, revealing the underlying form of the body.

Skinny jeans, yoga pants, spandex, leggings, tights, etc. only change the color of a person’s skin. Tight clothing reveals the form of the body rather than concealing it, drawing the eyes of those who observe, sexualizing encounters rather than promoting and preserving chastity.

In recent years, public school officials across the country have been banning yoga pants and other tight leggings because they are distracting to male students. School faculties recognize that male students are inattentive to classroom instruction when girls wear skin-tight clothing. These rules are designed to help avoid the sexualization of students, and create a better learning environment.

Both men and women have a responsibility in this regard. Jesus warned against looking upon a woman with lust (Matt. 5:28). Job made a covenant with his eyes not to look longingly upon a maiden (Job 31:1). Men must control their thoughts, but women must also be mindful of the need for proper attire. Tight clothing shows a lack of attention to shamefastness, i.e., a necessary sense of shame that is rooted in one’s character (1 Tim. 2:9).

Clothing that is Too Low/Loose

Christians should avoid clothing that is too low or loose. Modest clothing will conceal the chest.

Just as clothing may be too short, or too tight, shirts or blouses may also be too low or loose, exposing or accentuating the breasts. This aspect of our physical being should be reserved for the shared intimacy of marriage (Prov. 5:15-23; Song of Sol. 8:8-14). www.markmayberry.net/the-meaning-of-modesty