

A Return To Modest Apparel

by Jeff Pollard

“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

[1 Cor 6:20]

Reformed Practice - Modesty and Dress

Vicent 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 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.
