

## Modesty

Holiness involves both the inner man and the outer man (I Corinthians 6:19-20; I Thessalonians 5:23). We must perfect holiness by cleansing ourselves of filthiness both of the flesh and of the spirit (II Corinthians 7:1). For example, lustful thoughts are as sinful as an act of adultery (Matthew 5:27-28), and hatred is just as sinful as murder (I John 3:15). Holiness, then, includes attitudes, thoughts, and spiritual stewardship on the one hand and actions, appearance, and physical stewardship on the other. One without the other is insufficient. Inward holiness will produce outward holiness, but the outward appearance of holiness is worthless without inward holiness. For example, a modest spirit will produce modest dress, but modest dress is of little value if it conceals a lustful heart.

Holiness or sanctification is not a means of earning salvation but a result of salvation. As such, it comes by grace through faith. Holiness cannot be manufactured by words of the flesh but must come as we submit to the leadership and control of the Holy Ghost. We are holy in a twofold sense. On the one hand, we receive an immediate sanctification (separation from sin) through the death of Christ when we are baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost (I Corinthians 6:11; Hebrews 10:10). God counts us holy by imputing Christ's righteousness to us. On the other hand, we must follow after and seek holiness (Hebrews 12:14). We must strive after holiness and receive the progressive work of sanctification. We are already sanctified, but we are also called to be saints (sanctified, holy ones) (I Corinthians 1:2).

Many times what we wear helps to mold their expectations as well as our own. When a woman wears an immodest dress, she begins to think of herself as seductive and acts accordingly. Other people perceive her as provocative and treat her as such, which reinforces her behavior. In short, appearance both reflects and to a large degree determines what we are in the eyes of self and others.

We must ask what practices of the time concerned God enough for Him to inspire this passage. What clothing did Paul have in mind when he warned against immodesty of dress? In a day when women wore robes to the ankle, what type of immodest dress existed? If Paul found immodest clothing in an age characterized by greater modesty of dress than our own, certainly he would consider many styles of clothing today to be immodest. As Chapter 8 will note, many women of the time tucked in their tunics above the knee for convenience in certain activities, and the early church fathers considered this immodest. God was concerned about modesty of dress in a day when even exposing the upper leg was considered immodest. In Isaiah 47:2-3 God considered baring the leg and uncovering the thigh to be shameful exposure of nakedness. This gives us a good idea as to what God would regard as the minimum standard of modesty, regardless of culture.

The basic reason for modesty of dress is to subdue the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. The exposed body tends to arouse improper thoughts in both wearer and onlooker. To implement the purpose behind modest dress, the body should basically be covered, except for those parts which we must use openly for normal living. This suggests that clothes should cover the torso and upper limbs. Reasonable guidelines, then,

would-be women's dresses over the knee and sleeves to the elbow. In addition, we should avoid low necklines, sleeveless dresses or shirts, very tight clothes, very thin clothes, and slacks on women because they immodestly reveal the feminine contours of upper leg, thigh, and hip. Likewise, swimming in mixed company is immodest. Since the primary effect of makeup is to highlight sex appeal, we reject makeup as immodest.

To some degree modesty is culturally relative. We must certainly dress in a manner that would be considered modest for the occasion and in the judgment of our culture. For example, 19th century society considered it improper for a woman to expose any of her leg in public. Applying principles of Christian liberty, a Christian woman of that day should not have worn a knee-length dress, for this would have brought reproach upon her and the Lord. However, there must be a minimum of modesty that is absolute. Otherwise, if society condoned total nudity, Christians could walk around nude. If so, we could delete I Timothy 2:9 from the Bible as irrelevant.

Finally, the heart must be modest and motives pure. Conduct, gestures, gait, body language, and speech must be modest. If a woman wants to, she can display her body immodestly and act seductively even in the most modest of dresses. We must never use dress to promote immodest conduct, and no degree of external modesty can cover-up an immodest, lustful spirit.

A sign posted in an Orthodox Jewish district of Jerusalem provides an interesting definition of modesty for women's dress:" Passage permitted 'only' to women dressed modestly! Long dress, lower than knee length (no slacks).Long sleeves, beyond elbow length. Closed Neckline"(National Geographic, July 1985, p. 30).