

IMMODEST MODESTY I Timothy 2:8-10

"Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument.⁹ Also, the women are to dress themselves in modest clothing, with decency and good sense, not with elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive apparel,¹⁰ but with good works, as is proper for women who affirm that they worship God."

INTRODUCTION

Today.com featured an article on March 31, 2015, *Why Covering up Is Cool: Inside Fashion's Modesty Movement*. Rheana Murray reports, "Maybe you've already noticed the change: Young women in one-piece swimsuits at the beach, loose tunics replacing tank tops in the summertime, chunky knits instead of tight sweaters in the winter. It's all part of a growing modesty movement in the fashion world, where sexy styles take a backseat to classier, more conservative looks. . . . And it's not just Muslim women making moves in the fashion world—there are countless Mormon, Catholic and Orthodox Jewish women blogging and designing, too. . . . New York City fashion stylist Mindi Smith thinks fashion as a whole is becoming more modest, and points to retro-inspired trends like one-piece swimsuits and high-waisted, wide-legged pants as proof. 'It's no longer about, "If you've got it, flaunt it,'" Smith told TODAY.com. 'There is something sexy to be said about covering yourself up. You don't have to show all that skin. And you're not just seeing this in women in their 30s and 40s. You're seeing it with girls in their 20s. It's refreshing.'"

A young Christian girl was at the forefront of this Modesty Movement. The *Seattle Times* of May 21, 2004, reported Ella Gunderson grew frustrated trying to find something fashionable — yet modest — in a world surrounding her with low-riding jeans and tight, revealing tops. She penned a letter to Nordstrom's Department Store headquarters in Seattle. "Dear Nordstrom. I am an eleven-year-old girl who has tried shopping at your store for clothes (in particular jeans), but all of them ride way under my hips, and the next size up is too big and falls down. I see all of these girls who walk around with pants that show their belly button and underwear. Your clerks suggest that there is only one look. If that is true, then girls are supposed to walk around half naked. I think that you should change that." Nordstrom executives replied by promising her the company would educate its purchasing managers and salespeople on the range of fashion choices that should be available to young people. Ella's faith in Christ and prayer life were her strongholds as she catapulted to national attention by interviews on CNN and NBC's *Today Show*. Ella credits the Holy Spirit with prompting her letter. She says we should never underestimate ourselves or our ability to be used by God. "I've learned that if you stand up for what you think is right, then you just might be heard."

Our sermon today will unfold in two Outline Points: Immodest Modesty and Modest Modesty.

I. IMMODEST MODESTY

Most of us are probably keenly aware of how much our notions of modesty have changed in our nation in recent years. Our focus today is not primarily "modesty" understood as "humility." Once we are convicted of how disgusting our selfish actions make us appear to a God of perfect love, goodness, and holiness, and after we cry out for mercy to God to forgive and accept us into His family based solely upon the horrifying death of the Son of God in our behalf, we cannot flaunt our assumed prideful superiority over others with a clear conscience! We take to heart the firm instructions of **Philippians 2:3-5** (NIV): "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus"; and **I Peter 5:5b**: "And all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." A poster is found in some college dorms that spoofs a poor grasp of modesty as humility: "Once you get past my charm, good looks, intelligence, and my sense of humor, I think it's my modesty that stands out."

Ideas of modest clothing have changed in recent years. In the 1950s, professional tennis players wore loose, full-length pants; not skimpy shorts, even competing in championship matches. Prior to WWII, two-piece swimsuits for women, or swimming briefs for men, were rarely if ever seen at our nation's beaches or public swimming pools. At Christian campgrounds, mixed swimming of boys and girls was not the norm at least through the 1970s. Yet, by the late 1960s, in my early years as a Christian, girls' bikini swimsuits were often seen even at church youth events. As a naïve Christian teenager who grew up watching beach party movies, it never crossed my mind that bikinis had not been worn by young women when swimming for decades. I didn't realize I had allowed current society's standards of modesty, not the Bible, to set my standards as a Christian. Is it difficult to escape the way prevailing standards of modesty and decency during our formative years and in current society become our own standards of modesty, regardless of what the Bible teaches? A dear friend who is a fervent servant of our Savior recently commented that what used to be considered acceptable clothing only as *underwear* has now become acceptable as *outerwear* in our country! This is another way of saying that current standards of modesty for both men and women would have been almost universally condemned as immodest in the not too distant past.

In general, it's safe to say God's Spirit seeks to *clothe* us modestly while the Devil seeks to *unclothe* us immodestly. Without God's Spirit reigning in our hearts with selfless love toward others, most of us, even as Christians, easily fall prey to temptations of indulging sexual urges for purely selfish reasons. God knows this. Almost the first thing God did after our ancestors Adam and Eve made a god of their self-serving desires is recorded in **Genesis 3:21**: "The LORD God made clothing out of skins for Adam and his wife, and He clothed them." Why, because our bodies are evil? No; it's because we have become selfishly evil and can be ruined by abuse of sexual desires God gave us to maximize love, not lust.

Prior to 1960, just two sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) were commonly known among us, syphilis and gonorrhea. They infected less than 1% of our population and were easily treatable with antibiotics. The Center for Disease Control reported in October of 2014 that 110 million Americans now have at least one of 27 different STDs on any given day, with 20 million new infections annually; half among youth ages 15-24. One-in-5 Americans now live with an incurable sexually transmitted disease. Our bodies were not made for multiple sexual partners; whether actual or virtual. New studies show repeated exposure to online pornography causes our brain to shrink! God never intended for sex to be dangerous. God's design for sex, which emphasizes saving sexual intimacy until marriage, is the only truly "safe" sex.

But these alarming statistics are true only of the general American population. The destructive power of sexual abuse is rarely found within, "the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (**I Timothy 3:15**, NASB), right? Tragically, no. Porntopurity.com reveals sexual hypocrisy among Christians is epidemic: 50% of Christian men and 20% of Christian women are now addicted to pornography. A Pastors.com survey found 54% of pastors viewed Internet porn within the last year & 30% within the last 30 days; 53% of men attending a Promise Keepers Conference viewed porn the previous week; an Alabama Baptist survey found that 4/10 pastors and 7/10 church leaders admitted to visiting adult web sites at least once a week. The consequences of STDs and addiction to pornography are now so epidemic even within our churches that we will launch early next year the *Conquer Series: The Battle Plan for Purity*. It's been created by Dr. Ted Roberts, a former U.S. Marine Corps fighter pilot in Vietnam and founder of Pure Desire Ministries International. Having battled and triumphed against sexual temptation himself, Dr. Roberts will present scientific facts and, in military style, teach us how to use the weapons God has given us to prevail against this Satanically driven assault against our souls.

II. MODEST MODESTY

Every study of sexual addiction and abuse reveals exposure to immodest clothing and pictures are at the start and at the heart of these vital issues. This is why we need a Christlike understanding of "modesty."

"Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument.⁹ Also, the women are to dress themselves in modest clothing, with decency and good sense, not with elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive apparel,¹⁰ but with good works, as is proper for women who affirm that they worship God." Paul first singles out the public behavior of men who pledge their hearts in loyalty and love to Christ. They are to take responsibility as spiritual leaders in their homes and churches. Their prayers should be backed by the "clean hands" (**Psalms 24:4**) of one living a "holy" life separated from ungodly actions. They should not harbor "anger" or ill will toward anyone but should be as quick to forgive those who offend them as they hope to be forgiven of offending God (**Matthew 6:12, 14**). They should also avoid a contentious attitude toward God demonstrated by a lack of faith in Him, despite going through the motions of prayer, and should learn to disagree with others without being disagreeable.

But men are also included in Paul's guidelines to women about modesty, as the reality of the struggles with addiction to pornography among Christian women today drives home. At the time Christ claimed me at age 18, I had lifted weights enough to have some muscles for the first time in my life. I could actually curl 75 lbs. with one arm (today I probably couldn't do this with both arms!). I enjoyed going around without a shirt. But then the words of **Jesus** of **Matthew 18:7** (NIV) convicted me: "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!" I haven't gone without a shirt in public, even when swimming, for over 40 years.

Paul gives us something far better than a dress code in **I Timothy 2:9-10**. He instructs us to be guided in our choices of "modest clothing" by the principles of "decency and good sense." We derive our word "cosmetic" from the Greek word here for "modest." It refers to clothes "within proper bounds; neither too extravagant nor too minimal for the occasion." In other words, avoid being overdressed or underdressed, especially in public. The Greek word for "decency" in this context means we are to be honorably committed never to disgrace the character of our Savior by how we dress. We derive our word "sober" from the Greek word for "good sense." It describes an inner "self-control"—a spiritual radar—"that restrains our impulses" to vanity, conformity, or convenience that compromise good judgment in how we dress. When we held our first church-wide picnic in April of 2013, I wore "modest" knee-length red shorts. Arizona State Prison Chaplain Steve Young led the devotion. I was there to enjoy the fellowship of our Church family. Were I to wear these shorts while preaching here on a Sunday morning, I would lack "good sense."

Paul wrote these words to Timothy, who served as lead pastor of the church Paul founded in Ephesus. Some women of that time were consumed with flaunting their wealth by the "elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive apparel" Paul mentions. Pliny, a Roman author, philosopher, and military commander (AD 23-79) reported a bridal dress cost the equivalent of over \$1 million today! Such selfish extravagance that ignores the needs of the honest poor flies in the face of all Christian decency. But so does clothing that is too revealing and invites sexual fantasies. *Whatever a man can readily see of a woman with his eyes invites him to touch the woman there with his thoughts.* Clothing is often the first statement we make about who we are to those who don't know us. And because clothing says something about the person wearing it, how we dress is always relevant to our Christian witness. A delightfully arranged woman I know embraced **Jesus** as her Savior in her 30s. She soon replaced her swimsuits because the Holy Spirit convicted her they had emphasized her voluptuousness in ways that demeaned her character as a Christian woman.

CONCLUSION

Jeff and Marsha Fisher are committed Christians. Jeff worked in a Southern Baptist Associational office in Buffalo, NY. He then served as the full-time pastor of church plant for nearly a year. His world imploded when the Director of Missions and the pastor sponsoring his mission church confronted him in 2006 with a folder full of pornographic websites he'd visited from the denominational office. Just weeks before, Jeff had assured Marsha (who'd been aware of his struggles with pornography) he'd beaten online addiction. After the Fishers scoured the Internet for web sites to encourage Christian couples experiencing

the isolation, shame, and hopelessness engulfing them, they launched their own site, *From Porn to Purity: Rebuilding a Marriage Broken by Porn*. Through intense counseling and repentance, the Fisher's marriage survived. They now work non-ministry jobs while maintaining their web site, offering tips and resources to help people defeat the underlying issues contributing to pornography. "It's just the silent sin and the thing people don't want to talk about," Jeff says. Furthermore, he added, "It's really a lie to believe you're alone in this battle."

A crucially important way the people of this Church, or any church, can stand with people already battling sexual addiction, or can help keep others from being drawn into and defeated by fantasies of sexual intimacy outside of marriage, is to "dress [our]selves in modest clothing, with decency and good sense," and "with good works" of Christlike character and Christian service, "as is proper for [men and] women who affirm that they worship God."

To help our ladies achieve these worthy goals, for whom it's often much more difficult to find clothing worthy of our Savior than it is for men, these web sites specialize in helping you:

- (1) Sweet Salt Clothing: Modest, Fashionable, and Affordable Clothing for Women, <https://www.sweetsaltclothing.com/>
- (2) ModLi: Sophisticated & Classy Modest Dresses, <https://modli.co/dresses.html>
- (3) DM Fashion: Divine Modestee, <https://dmfashion.com/>
- (4) Stitch Fix: Your Partner in Personal Style (the personal styling service tailored to your taste, budget and lifestyle that helps you look and feel your best every day), <https://www.stitchfix.com/>