

Salt & Light

Summer 2007

The Newsletter of the Social Concerns Ministry Team

Educating and informing the church body in light of biblical principles

You are the salt of the earth...
You are the light of the world...

Mt. 5:13-14

Editorial Note:

Is modesty still important today? When people talk about modesty do you think they are being old-fashioned, prudish or legalistic? Is the issue of modesty sometimes dismissed because it is difficult to talk about? Our summer issue of *Salt and Light* explores this often controversial topic. Our first article from Focus on the Family introduces the topic from a challenging point of view. It helps us to see how (im)modesty can affect others, and how what we wear can influence what and how others think. The next two articles are more practical as they focus on the role a parent can play in teaching a child about modesty. And is modesty only about the clothes we wear? The article on page three states that modesty is ultimately an issue of the heart. Finally, the newsletter concludes with a short "heart check" from Nancy Leigh DeMoss to help you evaluate modesty in your life. And while the "check" is addressed to women, it certainly can apply to a man's life as well.

Modesty Matters

From: Shaunti Feldhahn for Focus on the Family (www.focusonthefamily.com)

Over the past few years, I've surveyed nearly 5,000 people for books that help men and women understand each other. During this fascinating process, my greatest surprise was the disconnect between men and women on modesty. In recent decades, our culture has ramped up overt sexuality — suggesting it should be out there for all to see — and has encouraged a "do what makes you feel good" ethos. Each of those trends is toxic.

Cultural Message #1: Nothing is wrong with overt sexuality

We have become desensitized to public displays of sexuality that would have been unthinkable two decades ago. Those displays are primarily conveyed through women's clothing—or the lack thereof. Walk through any shopping mall or watch TV and you'll see ads shouting that it's fine for a woman to show off in skimpy lingerie — and it's fine for a man to look. You'll see attractive young men and women conveying that low-rise jeans and spaghetti-strap midriff tops are not only fine, but this kind of dress is also cool and fun.

The cultural message is, "Hey, if you've got it, flaunt it. Nothing wrong with that."

The problem is, there is something wrong with that. Yet most women don't know why it is wrong. So modesty can easily become a "rule" to be resented or brushed aside.

Plus, many men see nothing wrong with enjoying the scenery

and believe that any woman who's showing off her body knows exactly what she is doing. Guys, believe it or not, she usually does not know. At least, not in the way you mean. Yes, the woman in question knows she looks good and enjoys the attention. But the woman thinks, *He thinks I'm cute.*

The guy likely thinks she's saying, *I want you to mentally undress me.*

Contrary to what our culture says, a woman's tight shirt or short skirt is a threat to the mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of the men around her. Though it surprises most women, a female whose outfit calls attention to a good figure presents a serious temptation to even the most godly, devoted man. He is faced with an internal struggle, and it takes a significant effort to make the right choice and not fantasize about her. If a man lets his thoughts go, he dishonors God, his wife and that other woman—and he sets himself up for an ever-deepening struggle with sin. Yet our culture makes sin easy and purity difficult. Just as many women see nothing wrong with dressing immodestly, many men see nothing wrong with the lingering look or filling their brain with immodest media images.

With constant exposure to sexual images and messages, a man can easily think that immodest thoughts are "not really sin" if he doesn't act upon them. But Jesus made it clear that purity begins in the mind: "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

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Winnetka Bible Church 555 Birch Street Winnetka, IL 60093

Prior issues of *Salt & Light* available at www.wbc.org

Modesty: A Lost Virtue?

From: Article by Jeffrey D. Murrah for Parent University (www.pasadenaisd.org/ParentUniversity)

Modesty, like many virtues begins at home. Parents are key in training their children, both male and female in either modesty or immodesty. When something is precious and valuable, it deserves protection. Modesty as a virtue is not limited to clothing. Modesty includes conduct, gestures, language, reading and thought. Parental habits influence and train children in each of these areas.

Training children in modesty begins early. If parents wait to address modesty until prom preparation and high school dances, it is too late. The selection of clothing in early childhood begins shaping the preferences for later life. Before selecting body hugging and skin revealing clothes because they are "cute," consider if you want your son or daughter wearing similar items as a teen. Encouraging pre-teens to wear thongs and seductive garments only encourages further immodest behaviors.

Children pay attention to parental

dress. Parents show them how adults are supposed to dress. Going shirtless or parading around the house in undergarments sends messages to our children. Such behavior makes it embarrassing to bring friends over and increases an uncomfortable self-consciousness within young children. Although some Ivy League schools encourage co-ed bathrooms, such behavior is offensive to more modest Texas values in our community.

Parental attitudes are important. Problems develop when parents place extreme emphasis on physical features rather than internal qualities or talents. Referring to members of the opposite sex as "body parts" rather than as persons not only fosters physical, but also mental immodesty. If the only time parents give attention to their children is when they are dressed immodestly, they then learn how to repeat those reactions with other adults. If dad or mom only show interest in members of the opposite

gender based on the amount of skin displayed, children learn such behaviors as a way to receive attention. The children learn from what they observe, rather than what they are told.

It is troubling that more alarm occurred recently regarding a student wearing a Mississippi state flag shirt rather than the influence of immodest dress and the behavior of children. Excessively tight kakhi pants that leave little to the imagination, immodest gestures and frequent viewing of music videos directed by pornographers corrupt morals faster than any t-shirt containing a message would. Yet, parental actions speak louder than words concerning what is considered a threat.

Reversing the societal trend toward increasing immodesty will not occur overnight. Parents can begin changing this trend within their home. Parental behavior needs to reflect that modesty in conduct, behavior, language and thought is a priority by example. †

Modesty: A Heart Issue

From: Lenora Hammond, "Modesty – The Undressing Of Our Youth" in *Christian Action Magazine* (www.christianaction.org.za)

Modesty is not just an issue of how we dress, but more importantly, it is an issue of the heart. We are to train our children in godliness in all areas of life, and this must include clothing. There is little gain if we teach our girls to be great cooks and homemakers, when they are then led to think they can dress the way the world dictates. Scripture speaks to all areas of life, and our outward appearance is part of this. Christian modesty is the inner self-government, rooted in a proper understanding of one's self before God, which outwardly displays itself in humility and purity from a genuine love for Jesus Christ.

"Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." Rom 13:10

The real debate should not center around lots of rules and regulations and legalism. On how long the skirts can be, and on whether the

ankles can be shown off or not. The debate is between God as Lawgiver or man as lawgiver.

Noah Webster, on defining modesty, says that modesty is synonymous with chastity, or purity of manners. In other words, modesty results from purity of mind.

It is our duty as parents to guide our children to desire purity from the heart, because it is God's way. The last thing I want for my daughters is to dress a certain way for their mom and dad, and as soon as they are old enough, to dress as they please. This would be a reflection of what is in their heart, which would by implication mean that we as parents have failed. As parents, we have about 10 or so years, to dress the heart of the child. This child then will dress her body in a way that reflects the heart....

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, Who

is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." 1 Cor. 6:19-20

Lest we forget about sons here, may I suggest the following?: Fathers, encourage your sons to tell female friends that they disapprove of suggestive clothing. Girls should be told by young men that dressing modestly is the preferred choice – by far. Youth leaders too, should be encouraged to have sessions and discussions on this subject....

Practically, may I also encourage you to speak to your favorite retail shop. If where you shop for your daughter the available clothes are not wholesome, tell them. Complain loudly. Let them know you are taking your business elsewhere. If enough pressure is put on them they will have to listen and provide modest options. †

Modesty: A Life Issue

From: www.allaboutGod.com/modesty

Modesty is a human characteristic which may alternately be viewed as a virtue or a weakness. How it is viewed ultimately depends on your perspective. There are several definitions for modesty in most dictionaries; it is most often rendered as humility, shyness, or simplicity. In today's society any of these definitions of modesty may be seen as negative since we often focus on self; self esteem, self respect, and self expression.

We can display modesty in life. Quietness, humility, and simplicity are values to be grasped and sought after. The Bible even talks about this. Colossians 3:12 says, "Since God chose you to be the holy people whom He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience."

A life of modesty is lived towards God and each other. Towards God, we recognize Him as the source of all our gifts, abilities, and strength. We know that we can do nothing apart from Him, that we are fully dependent upon Him for everything we need. As a result we acknowledge Him in every undertaking fully trusting His

wisdom, that He will always do what is best for us. Towards each other we show our modesty by honoring others before ourselves.

We do not fight and compete but willingly allow others to have the place of prominence. Philippians 2:3 says, "Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself." We must be confident that our own abilities will open any necessary door for us and so quietly, give ourselves to the pursuit of excellence. Christians are representatives for Christ wherever they go, in whatever they do. When we excel we glorify God who gave us our ability. 1 Corinthians 4:7 says, "What makes you better than anyone else? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if all you have is from God, why boast as though you have accomplished something on your own?"

Modesty may be obtained by adopting the mindset of Jesus Christ. Philippians 2:5-8 says, "Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the

humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross."

Most people do not naturally possess an attitude of modesty as characterized by humility and simplicity. We instinctively seek recognition and attention. We want others to honor us for who we are and what we have done. However, if we follow after Christ as His disciples, we will divest ourselves of all self-seeking and submit ourselves to God. Living a life of modesty is a personal determination. We purposefully set out to be content, patiently waiting for God to give the promised rewards, which do come, even in this life. God is faithful; He sees all that we do. Contrary to the modern belief that we allow ourselves to become doormats and castoffs, those who honor God and live humbly before Him have His promise upon which to depend. 1 Peter 5:6 says, "So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and in his good time he will honor you." †

A Modesty Heart Check

From: Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *"The Look: Does God Really Care What I Wear?"*

It is important to remember that modesty is not first an issue of what we wear. It is essentially a heart issue. If our hearts are right with God—if we are walking in purity and humility before Him—the inevitable result will be a modest external appearance. A heart of modesty affects every aspect of a woman's life, not just the way she looks, but her attitudes and the way she talks and acts, as well.

Here are some "Heart-check" questions to help you think through and evaluate modesty in different areas of your life:

- Do I have a humble view of myself and a high view of God?
- Do I avoid advertising or promoting myself?
- Am I free from extremes of behavior and personality? (this includes excessive spending habits)
- Am I grieved at the thought of offending God or causing someone else to sin?
- Am I appropriately reserved in speech, or do I talk too much?
- Do I always have to be the life of the party and the center of attention?
- Am I free from showiness and ostentation? (this includes being forward, arrogant, aggressive, controlling or domineering)
- Am I appropriate in my behavior?
- Am I appropriately reserved in dress?
- Do I wear "respectable" clothing (1 Tim 2:9 says that respectable means orderly, decent, not causing distraction or temptation) †

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Winnetka, IL 60093

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Modesty Matters

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Cultural Message #2: Do whatever makes you happy

Any woman must now decide what she will do from this point forward. She can choose to believe the unpalatable truth and modify her behavior. Or she can continue to enjoy the attention she's generating, even though she knows the message it sends to any man who sees her.

Culture says, "Do whatever makes you feel good. You're not responsible for others' struggles."

And that is why the second message is so toxic; it shouts that we need to look out for No. 1. A Christian woman who has subconsciously accepted this cultural lie continues dressing immodestly, even after she knows

that it will — as one man said — "put the skids under the guys she knows." A man who has bought into the same lie refuses to fight the temptation of immodest thoughts and doesn't guard his eyes.

This runs counter to Christ-like selflessness: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others"

(Philippians 2:4). Modesty is not about our preferences; it is about concern for others.

Fortunately, as I've written and spoken about modesty, I have seen many men daily working to "take every thought captive out of reverence for Christ" and many women and girls committing to be a support — not a stumbling block — to the men around them. †

Members of the Social Concerns Ministry Team

Scott Carlson	Tom Clark	Tony Eager
Hillary Kolssak	Eileen Moore	John Kilner, Chair
John Rousopoulos	Ron Solyst	(847-256-5347)

Newsletter Layout: Carrie Wiebe