

How Does God Address the Subject of Dress?

by Bryan Gibson

Let's first identify some areas of concern: most, if not all swimwear; at least some of the uniforms worn by those who participate in sports; shorts that only go down to about mid-thigh, and get even shorter when one sits down; short skirts; low-cut tops, which seem to be very popular with women today; see through clothing; tight clothing; men who walk around without a shirt, or who wear a "muscle shirt"; and even the revealing wedding dresses that some brides wear. How does God address the subject of dress in general, and these areas of concern in particular?

God teaches us a number of qualities or virtues to "put on," all of which have an effect on what we wear, or don't wear. Here's at least a partial list of those qualities: self-control (Galatians 5:23); modesty, shamefastness, and sobriety (1 Timothy 2:9, ASV); meekness and quietness (1 Peter 3:3-4); humility (1 Peter 5:5); chastity and discretion (Titus 2:5). Put these on, and you'll have a difficult time putting on any of the outfits mentioned above.

God says it's shameful to be naked (Isaiah 47:3; Nahum 3:5; Revelation 3:18), unless, of course, you're in the presence of your spouse, or perhaps members of the same sex (although we would advise great caution with the latter). Sounds rather obvious, but bear in mind that God's definition of naked is a little different than ours. Yes, you're naked when you don't wear any clothes (Job 1:21), but you're also naked when you wear just a "loin covering" (Genesis 3:7, 10), when you show your buttocks (Isaiah 20:4), when you reveal your waist and thighs (Exodus 28:42), and when you expose your breasts (Ezekiel 16:7). Shouldn't a Christian, at least one with the virtues cited above, be more concerned with concealing than revealing?

God warns us about the seriousness of causing others to sin, in passages like Matthew 18:6-7: "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!" If speech can be enticing (Proverbs 7:21), then so can clothing. Woe to the man, or woman, who wears such clothing!

God calls us to a very high standard—His own holiness. "Be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). Anyone willing to argue that this does not apply to dress? And here's another passage to ponder: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed..." (Romans 12:2). For too long, we've allowed the standards of the world to become ours—in many areas, and particularly in the area of dress. Remember, if you're a Christian, you've been sanctified, or set apart from the world (1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:21). Dress accordingly, and that doesn't mean as close to "the line" as possible.

God wants us to set a good example, before both our fellow-Christians and the people of the world (1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8). When it comes to how you dress, could you join with Paul in saying, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1), or, "Brethren, join in following my example..." (Philippians 3:17)?