Modesty - The Undressing Of Our Youth

By Lenora Hammond

Unless you have not left your home in the last 20 years, you will have seen a deterioration in morals, and in particular in the way we dress. As Henry Van Til observed: "culture is religion externalised." By this he meant that the culture of a nation reflects the true faith of that people. Dress is not neutral. Historically, public nakedness went hand-in-hand with pagan religions. Cultures that worship nature and treasure sensuality tend to dress immodestly (loincloths and beads for example). Those, which make an idol out of material possessions, often fall prey to an enslavement of extravagance and high fashion.

On the other hand, cultures, which embrace true Christian piety, will seek to make personal holiness the driving standard for their dress code. You, and everyone else, have a dress code. You will have one either by design (your own choice of clothes and style), or by default (because you have let others dictate how you should dress). The way we dress as Christians should not scream: "Sex!" or "Pride!" or "Wealth!", but rather testify to purity, humility and moderation.

I would like to address this article to dads and husbands in particular. We tend to blame the women for how they dress, but I think in doing so we ignore the responsibility of the males. Dads, you need to be more jealous of your women. If your daughter asks you how she looks, don't just peer over the newspaper and say 'um, ok'. Rather, take the time to ask several questions. Ask her to: sit down, cross her legs, uncross them, stand up again, bend over, and only when you feel that all the 'bases are covered' should you give her your 'ok'.

"I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety..." 1Timothy 2:9
Parents should take the time to train and 'dress the heart' before the body is dressed. 1Timothy 2:9 says that women should adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety. The word modest has the general meaning of 'respectable' or 'honourable'. The word shamefacedness denotes 'a state of mind or attitude necessary for one to be concerned about modesty '. The word sobriety has among its meaning the general one of good judgment, moderation, self-control and 'habitual inner self-government'. "Unaffected modesty is the sweetest charm of female excellence, the richest gem in the diadem of their honour." (Noah Webster, American Dictionary of the English Language).

Therefore, 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 neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." Romans 13:10 The real debate should not centre 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.

No doubt, many of you have seen girls who have, by all standards, dressed modestly but have had seductive behaviour. They look as though they are virgins, but behave as though they wish they were not. This is a greater problem because it reflects a heart that is not pure.

"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 honour God with your body." 1Corinthians 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.

Fathers, remember that nakedness goes hand in hand with demon possession in Scripture. In Luke 8 we are told of the man driven by demons and that he was naked. After the power and the grace of Jesus healed this man, he was clothed and in his right mind. Similarly, Adam and Eve were naked in their sin, and God clothed them. It appears that Satan has been trying to strip man of his clothing ever since. Modern swimwear is the epitome of this – by design.
At the beginning of the 20th Century, what was considered lewd and naked in the city progressively became perfectly justifiable and permissible on the beach. The shift from street wear to underwear as a model cannot be defended. Much of what passes for swimwear covers less than underwear. We have legitimised nakedness, all in the name of recreation on the beach.

So where does the guilt lie? Is it with the women? Or the often-ignorant teenage girls parading the latest immoral trends in an ever increasing desire to be accepted or popular? Or is it with the men in the pulpits and in the homes? Males no longer lead, but are being led. They have all too often become feminised sex worshippers who follow silver-screen icons instead of God's Holy Word. How sad that so many pulpits and youth leaders today are led by the desires of women and children (and Hollywood) instead of by the Word of God. After all, no one wants to be labeled "a legalist"!

Fathers and husbands need to consider being more jealous of the women in their lives. For the sake of not only the women, but also for the sake of young men whose senses are bombarded daily with half-clad women who are like candles among gunpowder. How much harder we make it for these dear brothers when girls dress in a less than wholesome way.

"I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl." Job 31:1

Practically, may I also encourage you to speak to your favourite 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.

May God give us, as parents, the wisdom and insight needed to train our children to make the right choices from the start. If however we have failed, may we ask for forgiveness and start afresh, by encouraging our sons and daughters to 'dress the heart'.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Hebrews 10:24

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Resources used and recommended:
Christian Modesty, and the Public Undressing of America by Jeff Pollard
Vision Forum www.visionforum.com
Feminine Modesty (tape series) by Douglas Wilson Cannon Press
www.canonpress.org