

Biblical Standards of Dress

“And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” (Revelation 19:6–8)

The text above shows us that the Bride of Christ is to be clothed in fine linen, clean and white. This fine linen is described as the righteousness of the saints. We know that this is symbolic of our justification in Christ (cf *Isaiah 61:10*). One cannot enjoy the wedding feast without this garment, provided by the King (*Matthew 22:11-14*).

We are told that Christ is making for Himself a bride that is pure: *“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.” (Ephesians 5:25–28)* Jesus died to present to Himself this holy bride. Jesus purifies His bride with His own blood, thus justifying her, and then sanctifying her. Jesus desires and will have a pure bride. Paul was zealous to do his part in this work. *“Would to God you could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:1–2)*

When we look at Christ’s bride, who is clothed in this clean and white fine linen, we see that the church has been purchased, cleansed, and prepared for her heavenly bridegroom: she is pure. If the fine linen represents the righteousness of the saints in Christ, should not our fleshly reality conform to this spiritual reality? Certainly there is no great separation between the fleshly and the spiritual in the child of God. Although the flesh has sinful tendencies, we are to submit it to Christ; and we know that what is in our heart is made obvious in our flesh (*Proverbs 27:19; Matthew 12:34; Mark 7:14-23*). This being the case, we must assert that the Scriptures teach us that our clothing matters, and is often representative of what is within our hearts.

Why Clothing?

Why is clothing even necessary? After all, God made man without any clothing; and Adam and Eve were “naked and not ashamed” when God first created them. Even to this day we read, *“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” (Hebrews 13:4)* This demonstrates that there is a place in which nakedness is still acceptable and not shameful. This is why the law states that uncovering nakedness, which is probably a euphemism for fornication or adultery, is a sin (*Leviticus 18*). We must understand Leviticus chapter eighteen to be an exposition and application of the commandment prohibiting adultery. Sexual relations should only occur within the bonds of heterosexual marriage and to uncover the nakedness of another violates that bond, because nakedness and sexual activity are honorable and pure within marriage.

When sin entered, shame accompanied it. That is what we see when we read of Adam’s fall: *“And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” (Genesis 3:7–10)* Good desires for food and wisdom had become perverted (See *Genesis 3:6* and compare *1 John 2:15-17*). We know that, along with those desires, all other passions became misdirected. In fact, Scripture describes man thusly, *“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5)* The inward man became sinful, and thus nakedness and sexuality became things to protect from the

lustful eyes of the ungodly, as this would help protect the sanctity of marriage. This is why the young man is warned against lusting after the harlot: her revealing clothing is demonstrative of her heart, and he is to respect God and marriage enough that he does not long after adulterous deeds (*Proverbs 6:25-35*).

Nakedness apart from the marriage bed is described as shameful all through the Scriptures. Noah was naked to his shame, and his grandson's descendants were cursed because of looking upon him in that state (*Genesis 9:20-25*). When Aaron led Israel into the worship of a golden calf, "they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." (*Exodus 32:6*) This play was sexual in nature, as was most idolatrous worship and play in those times, and the Scriptures say that "Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame amongst their enemies:)" (*Exodus 32:25*). Isaiah speaks of Israel being made naked to their shame (*Isaiah 47:1-15*), Nahum speaks of nakedness as being synonymous with shame and deserving of mockery (*Nahum 3:4-7*), and we find that this is the case even when it is spoken of regarding one's spiritual state (*Revelation 3:17-18;16:15*). Obviously nakedness needs to be covered.

What Is Nakedness?

Nakedness is, first of all, the state of being uncovered or bare: but what is it that is bared that makes one naked? Most of us recognize that one's face can be uncovered and the person not be naked. We can say the same about hands and feet. Where do we go with this, then? As seen above, nakedness often carried with it sexual connotations. Nakedness is the uncovering or revealing that is sexual in nature. This means that we shall have to speak plainly here, and it may be a bit embarrassing; although there is no intent of being crude or vulgar. The plain truth must be spoken, however.

When Scripture speaks of nakedness, we immediately realize that it will refer to the uncovering of the genital area. In fact, when the LORD gave Moses commandment regarding the priests' clothing, He specifically directed him to make breeches (This was a legged undergarment.) that reached below the thigh. "And thou shalt make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach." (*Exodus 28:42*) Isaiah also spoke of the shame of the thighs being revealed (*Isaiah 47:1-4*). Based on this, we can certainly say that nakedness is revealing the leg above the knee. This establishes a sort of buffer zone that prevents prying eyes from seeing more than they should see and prevents inadvertent exposure of private areas. This is Most of us recognize that undergarments have typically been worn in a fashion that prevents them from being seen, so that the outer garment is actually covering and concealing even more than the undergarments. We also see that the buttocks are similarly spoken of in Scripture, as it logically follows that they would (*2 Samuel 10:1-6; Isaiah 20:1-6*). We can conclude that nakedness is any revealing of the flesh surrounding the private areas, from the waist to below the knee.

We can and must go farther to say that Scripture also associates the revealing of a woman's breasts as being nakedness. We know that nakedness is the private pleasure of the marriage bed (*Genesis 2:25; Hebrews 13:4*), and the young man is told to rejoice with his wife and to enjoy her breasts (*Proverbs 5:18-20*). Solomon's Song also mentions this explicitly (*Song of Solomon 1:13;4:5;7:37-38*). And when the LORD spoke to Israel of His rescuing her and making her a great nation, He used the analogy of clothing one who was naked, and giving covering that included her breasts (*Ezekiel 16:1-14*). Finally, Hosea is very plain about this, saying, "Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; And to your sisters, Ruhamah. Plead with your mother, plead: For she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: Let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, And her adulteries from between her breasts; Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, And make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, And slay her with thirst." (*Hosea 2:1-3*) Notice how God's Word associates sexual sin and nakedness by saying that Israel's adulteries were between her breasts. Just as an adulterous woman exposes what should be held sacredly private for her husband, so Israel had given herself away to idol gods. The results? Israel would be stripped naked to her shame by God. Thus we see that the revealing of a woman's breasts is nakedness.

Thus it is that we have seen the biblical definition and description of nakedness. This is very plain, but the Word of God is plain, and we should respect and honor the precepts found therein. It is very important that we be the pure bride to Christ that we should be. It is important that the principles of holiness are exhibited in our lives as we honor the Lord and the holy state of marriage by living according to principles of modesty.

The Purpose of Clothing.

“And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.” (Genesis 3:7)

*“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.”
(Genesis 3:21)*

With sin came shame, so Adam and Eve rushed to cover their nakedness by making aprons out of leaves. Thankfully the good Lord had a better plan. Taking the life of an animal and making clothing from the animal’s skins, He clothed them so that their nakedness did not appear. With this in mind, let us consider the Lord’s purpose for clothing, and what Scripture tells us about our apparel.

First of all, we need to consider the common objection that says, “The Lord looks on the heart!” Yes, that is true; but we need to consider the whole of the verse that is referenced. *“And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD’S anointed is before him. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:6–7)* Samuel had been sent to Jesse’s house to anoint the next king of Israel. Having seen Eliab, Samuel thought that he had surely found the next king, because Eliab was kingly looking. God told Samuel that he was looking at the man from the wrong perspective. The LORD had told Saul that He was seeking a man after His own heart (*1 Samuel 13:14*); so God was not looking at the outward appearance, although Samuel was. The interesting thing is that God told Samuel that man looks on the outward appearance. The reason that this is so, is because we cannot see a person’s heart. We can, however, see signs of what is in their hearts; because what is inside will most often show up on the outside. Thus what is in our hearts comes out of our mouths (*Matthew 12:34*), and the wickedness that is within a person’s heart shows up in his deeds (*Mark 7:21-23*), and the faith that is within a person shows itself strong by love (*Galatians 5:6*). While God does indeed look on the heart, that which is on the outside matters; because the outside normally reflects what is on the inside. Man will look at our outward appearance and decide many things about us by that. What does your outward appearance say about you? This is why modesty is spoken of along with shamefastness (inward modesty) and sobriety (self restraint and moderation of desires and passions): true modesty begins within the heart and manifests itself outwardly.

Why clothing? Clothing was given to mankind to cover and to conceal nakedness. Adam and Eve were ashamed of their nakedness after they had sinned. They instantly experienced shame, knowing that nakedness is not to be shared except within the private confines of the marriage bed. For this cause they made aprons for themselves; but those aprons were insufficient, just as our own attempts to cover up our sin are insufficient. As a symbol of the coming lamb whose blood would wash away our sins, and whose righteousness would clothe the believer, an animal gave its life so that Adam’s and Eve’s shameful nakedness would be covered. Clothing is to keep the shame of nakedness from appearing (*Revelation 3:18*), so we see that clothing is not simply a cover, but also a concealer. It is important to note this, because some clothing covers everything while revealing many things. Whether the clothing is form fitting, tight, low cut, or with slits very high, or even being somewhat transparent, a person can be covered and yet not concealed. Clothing is given to cover and to conceal: let us be sure to wear it appropriately.

Biblical Standards of Dress: Modesty A Matter of Heart

“I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.” (1 Timothy 2:8–10)

Modesty

As we continue our study of biblical standards of dress, we come to the subject of modesty. What is modesty? The dictionary meaning of the word deals with that which is well ordered or seemly. Our text above presents modesty to us as such as well. It also describes modesty in a broader sense, speaking of it as a matter of the heart.

Let us notice that modesty is not simply that which pertains to women because men are mentioned here as well. Men are told to pray “without wrath and doubting.” We shall see soon how that this relates to modesty, but for now we can simply state that it is certain that wrath and doubting are issues of the heart. Women are to dress modestly, yet their modesty must also be internal. They are to have a shamefastness and sobriety about them, as they profess godliness. Modest apparel seems to be the outward working of a modest heart. True modesty is a well-ordered heart that then orders one’s behavior rightly.

Often there are those who reply, stating that the Scriptures say that God looks on the heart. This is indeed so, because God told Samuel, who was evidently expecting God’s choice for the next king of Israel to be kingly looking, “*Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*” (1 Samuel 16:7) God does indeed look on the heart. On what, however, does man look? Man looks on the outward appearance. How are we to show our modesty and holiness if not by how we look outwardly? How will our light shine (Matthew 5:16), if Christ is not seen in our deeds and our dress? Modesty is indeed a matter of the heart, seen of God inwardly, and seen of men outwardly.

The Immodesty of Wrath And Doubting

Paul tells us that men are to pray and to do so without wrath and doubting. He tells us that men should pray lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. It would be impossible to lift up holy hands if one was filled with either wrath or doubt. Both of these things are serious matters of the heart.

Wrath is extremely immodest. It is not only disordered, but it manifests itself in manners that are disorderly and harmful. Solomon said, “*Only by pride cometh contention: But with the well advised is wisdom.*” (Proverbs 13:10) Contention comes from pride, and the proud heart is a heart that is not right with God and is not trusting in God (Habakkuk 2:4). That is by no means orderly. Contention is generally not a good state of affairs, yet some seek and pursue it. In so doing, they neglect to pray and often do much ill to others. James described this sort as pursuing their own selfish lusts, neglecting prayer, being friends of the world, and spiritually adulterous. Such immodest hearts and deeds lead to “confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16).

Doubting is also disorderly and unseemly. It is a matter of a heart that is unwilling to submit to what God says. King Ahaz was given the opportunity to seek a sign from the LORD, and yet he refused. God gave him the opportunity to have a confirmation that God’s promise would come to pass. In fact, Ahaz was commanded to ask for this confirming sign and yet refused to do so. God’s word to Ahaz was, “*If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.*” (Isaiah 7:9) We are later told that we are to pray in faith without doubting because the one who is wavering is double-minded and unstable in all of his ways (James 1:5-8). When a person is like this, he leans to his own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-7) and follows his flesh and his pride rather than humbly seeking the will of God.

In both of these instances, we find that an immodest heart will promote self. Proud self-promotion is by no means a helpful thing but is very detrimental to the health of a family, church, and society. It stirs up strifes, leads to chaotic conditions, and distracts us from the all-important pursuit of the glory of God. Remember, when Paul said, “*Let all things be done decently and in order,*” (1 Corinthians 14:40) it was

because the Corinthians had yielded to arrogant self-promotion, which led to chaotic conditions in the church.

Most of us recognize this sort of immodesty when we see it in others. Jesus spoke of the immodest self-promoters and spoke a parable regarding folks who went to public functions seeking positions of prominence. Jesus said that there would be times in which those who set themselves in positions of honor would be told that they were sitting in seats reserved for others. This would lead to their shame when they would have to then take a lower seat (Luke 14:7-11). Most of us would respond and say that such folks simply got their comeuppance. This is so, and God's people must resist having such immodest hearts.

The Modesty of Shamefastness And Sobriety

Paul told Timothy that women are to dress themselves in modest apparel with shamefastness and sobriety. It is to be noted that apparel is generally reflective of what is within us. Servants are to adorn the doctrine of God, we are told (Titus 2:10). In other words, what was in their hearts, their professed beliefs, and their convictions would be seen in their actions.

Shamefastness is a word that is no longer in standard English dictionaries. It means that one has a sense of honor or shame, propriety and impropriety, and a certain bashfulness as opposed to self-promotion. Just as men are very prone to promote themselves by exhibiting wrath or arrogant self-promotion, an immodest woman will often dress so as to be seen and recognized. For this reason, Paul contrasted shamefastness with the immodesty of some who elaborately plaited their hair, wore much flashy jewelry, or wore much expensive and showy clothing. Peter, too, spoke of the meek and quiet spirit of a godly woman, rather than the attention-seeking person who would dress to catch other's eyes (1 Peter 3:1-6).

Sobriety is not simply the issue of whether a person is intoxicated or under the influence of mind-altering substances. Sobriety is thinking clearly and sanely. We are taught to think soberly concerning ourselves in relation to God and the body of Christ (Romans 12:3). Sobriety and modesty go hand-in-hand because one who is sober will recognize their need to seek to be a blessing above simply trying to direct every eye her way. Sobriety is modesty of spirit, in which a person recognizes the need to glorify God and be a blessing to others above everything else.

Other Matters of Immodesty

Notice that modesty is not simply a matter that relates to whether or not a person's nakedness is covered and concealed. We have seen previously what nakedness is, and why God gives us a command to wear clothing. Modesty extends beyond that, however, and is related to the desire to call unwarranted attention to ourselves. Sometimes we do not have an accurate measure of ourselves and think too highly of ourselves. We desire our opinions to be known by those around us. If we are not careful, we will think ourselves to be worthy of other's attentions, or worthy of their obedience and reverence. This will manifest itself in an immodest display of loudness, arrogance, anger, or wrath; and it is sinful.

Modesty is also an issue of being a distraction. Can you imagine being a poor person in Timothy's day, and look around in the church service and see a woman who is dressed in very expensive clothing, wearing much flashy and expensive jewelry? A man might not be tempted to lust after her, and yet he could be distracted by her. He might look at this ostentatious display of wealth and think, "Wow! I could sell that necklace and buy groceries for a year!" It could minister to envy and strife also because of the flaunting of wealth. This seems to be a part of what happened in James chapter two, and it ministered to envy, strife, and division in the church.

Solomon spoke of the immodesty of the harlot in Proverbs chapter seven, warning young men against this sort of woman. In his description of her, he said, "*She is loud and stubborn; Her feet abide not in her house:*" (Proverbs 7:11) In other words, she is an attention seeker. She is not meek and quiet but is loud and stubborn. She desires to draw attention to herself. In her stubbornness, she resists yielding to the authority of God and her husband in honoring her marriage, and she goes out to seek attention and affection in ungodly manners. While we are dealing with biblical standards of dress, it is instructive to note that her immodesty made itself known in the volume of her voice, and her attitude toward authority

and her marital obligations. True modesty is humble and seeks to quietly honor God, godly authority, and godly commitments.

This loud immodesty brings to my mind the Pharisees, who prayed loudly in the streets, dressed in such a manner that people would know when they were fasting, and wore apparel that drew attention to their religious devotion. Jesus stated that they had their reward, which was the praise of men. True modesty does not make a vain show of religion, but simply tries to live to the glory of God regardless of who sees or does not see us.

Biblical Standards of Dress Part Three

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”
(Philippians 1:9–11)

Excellence Is in Holiness

As we come to this concluding article in our series, we need to consider the issue of excellence. Paul desired excellence from the Philippians. The word excellence means to differ. God’s desire and plan for His people is that they excel by differing from the world. By doing so, we will be pure, causing none to stumble, and will be filled with the fruits of righteousness, giving glory to God.

We must remember that God’s people are called to holiness. Holiness is a separation from the world to God. Without holiness, no man can see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). It is by our minds being renewed, ourselves transformed, and resisting conformity to the world that we will discern God’s good and perfect will (Romans 12:1-2). The Psalmist declares that the person who is blessed, or happy is the one who rejects the counsel of the world and enjoys the counsel of God, meditating in it, walking in it, and becoming rooted, stable, fruitful, and spiritually prosperous therein. Have you ever longed for stability, joy, fruitfulness, and the ability to be able to see the will and purpose of God more clearly? That comes through the passionate pursuit of holiness. It comes through separating ourselves from the world and following God instead of the world’s thought processes and ways.

We are told, *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”* (2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1) There can be no close affinity between the children of God and the ways of the world. We cannot embrace the ways and thought processes of the world, because they are opposed to the ways and thoughts of God (See Isaiah 55:8-9). Those who love the Lord are to hate evil (Psalm 97:10) and are not to love the world (1 John 2:15-17). Those who love the ways, thought processes, and sins of the world are said to not have God’s love in them. This is very serious, and we cannot afford to take it lightly or treat it dismissively. We are told that it is the holy person who is received by the Lord and is called His son and His daughter. Let us pursue excellence in holiness: it is God’s way of joy for us.

Clothing That Excels, Or Is Holy

For many years many of us have said little from our pulpits about clothing because we have not desired to be aligned with some who were critical, rude, and unholy in their attitudes and words regarding clothing. This has been a major mistake on our part because a search of God’s Word turns up over nine hundred references to clothing and other related terms. When something is spoken of to such a great degree, it must be important; and we would be wise to search out God’s will concerning it.

In an earlier article, we saw that God made clothing for Adam and Eve for a reason, and that was to cover their shame. We also can read the book of Proverbs and find that that there was an adulterous woman, and she wore the clothing of a harlot. Evidently her clothing revealed her shameful heart (Proverbs 7). In contrast to her, we find that the family of the virtuous woman was clothed in clothing that was nicely colored and evidently covered them well because it kept them warm in the cold (Proverbs 31:21). Evidently, there is a difference even between the clothing of the virtuous and those who are not virtuous. We also find that the bride of Christ is espoused to Him as a chaste virgin (2 Corinthians 11:1-2), that He will present her to Himself holy, spotless, and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25-28), and that He will clothe her with fine linen clean and white (Revelation 19:7-8); and this contrasts with the attire of

the adulterous religious system (Revelation 17:1-6). If clothing is to cover shameful nakedness, and the virtuous woman and the bride of Christ are clothed differently from the harlot and the satanic bride, should not the bride of Christ be clothed differently from the world while she is upon this earth?

To take this further, the Word of God shows us that clothing is an identifier. A person in mourning often tore his clothing (Joshua 7:8; Job 1:20; 2:11-13) or wore sackcloth (2 Samuel 3:31; Esther 4:1). The harlot was known by her clothing (Genesis 38:12-15; Proverbs 7:10). We also read of prison clothing (Genesis 41:14 cf 2 Kings 25:29). During David's day, the virgins were clad in clothing that signified their virtue (2 Samuel 13:18-19). Today we also see that people often dress differently according to their occupation or status. We recognize policemen by their uniform. In town, we see that the postman has his uniform. We also walk up to public restrooms, and the men's room and the women's room are differentiated by the silhouettes that are on the door.

We now come to the issue of difference and modesty that is so difficult for us today, the distinction between men and women in their clothing. The most important observation that can be made concerning this is the fact that we must remember that our calling as saints is to follow the leadership of the Lord in His Word and not that of the world (Psalm 1:1-6; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). It is not for the world and worldly fads to establish for us what is acceptable. That is the authority of God and none other. What does Scripture teach us? Scripture teaches us that there is a difference between men and women (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:4-5). It also shows us that a man could be known as a man from a distance: "*And Rebekah lift up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself.*" (Genesis 24:64-65)

Even in the New Testament, we find that men and women were naturally expected to appear differently one from the other (See 1 Corinthians 11:1-16). It is the New Testament that gives us a more in-depth understanding of a woman's clothing. As Paul told Timothy, "*In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel,*" (1 Timothy 2:9) he spoke of more than just modesty. The word apparel^{1&2} is literally a garment that is let down or a robe that reaches the feet. This instance is the only time that the word is used as such in the whole Bible, and it speaks specifically regarding a woman's garments. The very act of a garment being let down is different from the garment of a man, which is often spoken of as being girded upwards. While it seems that most people of both sexes wore some sort of robes, it is obvious that a woman's clothing was a sort of long dress, while a man would wear a long robe with a belt that would be used to pull up and aside his clothing so that he could work, run, or fight in a battle. There would have been, even then, a very visible distinction between men and women in their clothing.

What About Deuteronomy 22:5?

When we study the New Testament, we must remember that the New Testament builds upon the Old Testament; and we must recognize this as true in the case of clothing as well. Just as Rebekah could discern from a distance that Isaac was a man, we should be able to do the same today. When we read of the king's daughters, who were virgins, being clad in a certain manner, we are right to understand that the king's sons did not dress in that same manner. We also read, "*The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.*" (Deuteronomy 22:5) Again we see that God demands a distinction between men and women in their clothing, and that was affirmed in the New Testament, as we have already seen.

¹ **2689. καταστολή** *katastolē*; gen. *katastolēs*, fem. noun from *katastellō* (2687), to put or let down, appease. A long garment or robe reaching down to the feet (see Sept.: Is. 61:3). Apparel, dress in general, a garment, a long robe of dignity (1 Tim. 2:9). Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000.

² **2689 καταστολή** [*katastole* /kat-as·tol·ay/] n f. From 2687; TDNT 7:595; TDNTA 1074; GK 2950; AV translates as "apparel" once. **1** a lowering, letting down. **2** a garment let down, dress, attire. Strong, James. *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995.

Some will say that this text is obsolete because it is an Old Testament text, and we are not under the law. To these, we pose the following question: Does the Old Testament law regarding murder still stand as authoritative today? The answer is indeed in the affirmative. Simply because something is in the Old Testament does not mean that it is nullified.

Another may protest that we do not observe the Jewish dietary laws (See Leviticus 11:1-47), and that those who eat catfish would be inconsistent to observe Deuteronomy 22:5 as authoritative. The issue before us is the fact that the Jewish dietary laws were specifically for the Hebrew people and were abolished in Christ. Paul speaks of this in Romans chapter fourteen, and then he tells Timothy, “*For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*” (1 Timothy 4:4-5) While the dietary laws were done away with, we have already found that God has retained the demand for a distinction between men and women in what they wear.

Perhaps someone else will state that we do not build banisters on the roofs of our houses, so we are not obligated to observe Deuteronomy 22:5. Let us consider this verse. “*When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.*” (Deuteronomy 22:8) What is the issue before us? Is it not the issue of liability? Today we observe the spirit of this by buying liability insurance to protect us in the event someone is injured on our property or in our home. Surely, if we were to build a house with a flat roof, on which people were habited to walking about, we would be obligated to build a bannister of sorts in order to protect others and to lessen our liability. This being the case, we cannot dismiss or disregard Deuteronomy 22:5 based upon that argument.

What, then, should we think about Deuteronomy 22:5? We should consider that God indeed desires the distinction between men and women to be honored and observed, even in our clothing. The verse probably referred to women who would take up men’s clothing to go and work with men like men. It is thought by some commentators that it refers to a woman putting on armor to go to war as a man would. In these instances, issues of modesty and sexual propriety/impropriety would arise also, so we can certainly understand why the restriction is in place. While our culture has now influenced us to think differently about these things, it was only a few decades ago that women began to put on pants and go into the workplace dressed in them. It was not until the year 1993 that a woman wore a pantsuit onto the floor of the United States’ Senate in what was called, “The Pantsuit Rebellion.” It has been said that many in the Senate gasped audibly when this occurred. Things have changed rapidly, and we must ask ourselves whether God or culture has the authority to define our clothing.

We also consider the fact that the sexes should never be confused because God created male and female. “Transvestism was condemned because it spoke of unnatural mixing of clothing.”³ Albert Barnes said, “The distinction between the sexes is natural and divinely established, and cannot be neglected without indecorum and consequent danger to purity (cp. 1 Cor. 11:3-15).”⁴ The “King James Study Bible” tells us that transvestism was associated with homosexuality and idolatrous fertility rites. This informs us that the blurring or obliterating the lines between the sexes was about more than simply the appearance, but about sexuality; and God calls His people to holiness in sexual purity (See 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8). This is one of the reasons that Paul spoke as he did in 1 Corinthians chapter eleven, idolatrous practices in Corinth were immoral in nature, and the natural distinctions between men and women were maintained for spiritual and moral reasons.

John Gill stated that sometimes the distinction between the sexes was removed in dressing so that men could for lewd purposes enter in among women who were gathered privately. Matthew Henry stated, “men must not be effeminate.”⁵ Paul also spoke of this, saying, “*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall*

³ David S. Dockery, ed., *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 181.

⁴ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Exodus to Ruth*, ed. F. C. Cook and J. M. Fuller (London: John Murray, 1879), 312.

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 264.

not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9–10) Today, when we see so many men seeking to be like women, men dressing as women and going into women’s restrooms and locker rooms, we can see the wisdom of God in giving us this verse. It certainly was given to protect against the lewdness of ungodly people.

Ask yourself, as you are looking at your clothing, whether it is truly modest or not. Does it cover and conceal, or does it uncover and reveal? Does it attract attention to places that attention should not be given? Is it tight? Does it cling? Is it sheer? Does it make a man appear effeminate? Does it make a woman appear masculine? Does it appear sensual? These are important considerations, and we must remember that our clothing demonstrates what is in our hearts. Yes, God looks on the heart, but man looks on the outward appearance. Let us show them true and modest masculinity and femininity.

Concluding Thoughts

I realize that this goes against the way many of us have long thought. This goes contrary to our ideals of freeing women from what some would think are unreasonable constraints. Should someone reading this choose to disagree with this writer, he will certainly continue to love the one who differs from him. This is not written to stir up strife or to agitate and anger people. This is written with the desire to stir up thought, to provoke us to consider whether we are being modest or not. It is written to cause us to ask whether we have allowed the world’s customs to so greatly influence us that we have come to accept immodesty as a way of life to the point that we have joined in with the world.

Jesus Christ is Lord over every area of our lives, including the most visible of areas, which is our clothing. We should take heed to His commands to be holy, to surrender our thoughts to His Word, and to refuse to follow the counsel of the ungodly. God calls us to excellence by means of holiness. God calls us to modesty, and He calls us to show a visible and modest distinction between males and females.

Finally, we must recall that our duty as Christians is to give glory to God. *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31)* Often it seems that we seek to see how far we can go, or how much we can get away with. The question should not simply be, “Is this wrong.” The question should be, “Does this give glory to God, and does this represent my Savior well?”