

God, My Heart, and Clothes

by C. J. Mahaney

The following chapter, “God, My Heart, and Clothes,” appears in the forthcoming book *Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World*, © 2008. The book will be available from Crossway in September and currently available for pre-order. The chapter and discussion questions are used by permission of Crossway Books, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

When it comes to fashion, I’m deliberately out of step. I don’t care if what I’m wearing is trendy or not—in fact, it’s my goal to resist the influence of others (from Paris or Hollywood or anywhere else) over my wardrobe. Like any man’s man, I relish being *out* of style.

I want to feel comfortable in what I’m wearing, which is why my stained In-N-Out Burger T-shirt and old gray sweatpants are the most well-worn items in my closet second only to my single pair of jeans, which I wear any place a T-shirt and sweatpants would be inappropriate attire.

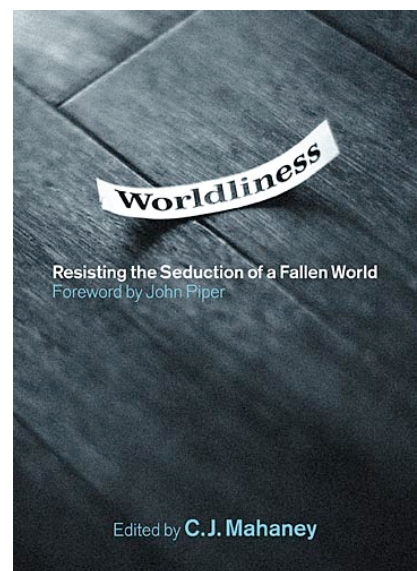
If you ever see me sharply dressed in public, it’s only because my wife and daughters, out of great concern for my appearance, buy me clothes on my birthday and for Christmas.

My wife and daughters, in contrast to me, *do* care about what they wear. They are lovely women with impeccable taste. Each one has her own unique style of dress, and I enjoy trying to find gifts that fit their individual styles.

“Adornment and dress is an area with which women are often concerned,” writes George Knight (who must have had teenage daughters). This is a good thing. God created women with an eye for making themselves and everything around them beautiful and attractive. But, as Mr. Knight goes on to observe, dress is also an area “in which there are dangers of immodesty or indiscretion.”¹

Many young women, though, are unaware of these worldly dangers. Several years ago I preached a message to our church from 1 Timothy 2:9 entitled “The Soul of Modesty.” Eventually, that message made its way into the hands of a young woman named Jenni. Prior to hearing my sermon, Jenni had no idea what God’s Word said about the clothes she wore, if anything at all. “Modesty used to be a foreign word to me,” Jenni later admitted in a testimony to our church congregation:

“My friends aptly nicknamed me ‘Scantily.’ When choosing what to wear I thought only of what would flatter me, what would bring more attention my way, and what



most resembled the clothes I saw on models or other stylish women. I wanted to be accepted and admired for what I wore. I enjoyed my attire, the undue attention I received, and the way it stimulated my feelings.”

Perhaps you can relate to Jenni. Maybe modesty sounds unappealing to you. If we played word association you’d come up with “out of style” and “legalistic.” Maybe you think God is indifferent about the clothes you wear. *What does he care?*

But, as Jenni ultimately discovered, there is “not a square inch” of our lives—including our closets—with which God is not concerned. Even more, he cares about the *heart* behind what you wear, about whether your wardrobe reveals the presence of worldliness or godliness.

The evidence comes from 1 Timothy 2:9 where Paul urges “that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, *with modesty* and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire.” Like 1 John 2:15 this is a verse we’re inclined to ignore or reinterpret to escape its imperative. But we must not snip 1 Timothy 2:9 out of our Bibles. Rather we must carefully seek to understand how it applies to our lives, our shopping habits, and the contents of our closets.

Now, this chapter is primarily written for women, not only because that’s who 1 Timothy 2:9 addresses, but also because this is a topic of particular concern for women. George Knight is correct, and a woman’s experience will tend to confirm the relevance and importance of this topic. However, modesty does have application for men—increasingly so in our culture. And especially for fathers, whose primary responsibility it is to raise modest daughters.

I write this chapter as the father of three daughters, now grown. I write as a pastor with a growing concern for the erosion of modesty among Christian women today. I write because God’s glory is at stake in the way women dress. I write about modesty because God has first written about it in his eternal Word.

So let’s take God to the Gap.

The Attitude of the Modest Woman

Any biblical discussion of modesty begins by addressing the heart, not the hemline. We must start with the attitude of the modest woman.

This emphasis on the heart is front and center in 1 Timothy 2:9. Note the phrase “with modesty and self-control.” All respectable apparel is the result of a godly heart, where modesty and self-control originate. Your wardrobe is a public statement of your personal and private motivation. And if you profess godliness, you should be concerned with cultivating these twin virtues, modesty and self-control.

Modesty means propriety. It means avoiding clothes and adornment that are extravagant or sexually enticing. Modesty is humility expressed in dress. It’s a desire to serve others, particularly men, by not promoting or provoking sensuality.

Immodesty, then, is much more than wearing a short skirt or low-cut top; it’s the act of drawing undue attention to yourself. It’s pride, on display by what you wear.

Self-control is, in a word, restraint. Restraint for the purpose of purity; restraint for the purpose of exalting God and not ourselves. Together, these attitudes of modesty and self-control should be the hallmark of the godly woman's dress.

In Paul and Timothy's day, modesty and self-control were foreign to many women walking through the local marketplace, just as they were to Jenni and are to the majority of women at the local shopping mall today. And these concepts are certainly foreign to modern fashion designers, whose goal in clothing design is sensual provocation.

But for godly women, modesty and self-control are to be distinctly present in the heart. The question is, are they distinctly present in yours?

Such an attitude will make all the difference in a woman's dress, as pastor John MacArthur has observed:

How does a woman discern the sometimes fine line between proper dress and dressing to be the center of attention? The answer starts in the intent of the heart. A woman should examine her motives and goals for the way she dresses. Is her intent to show the grace and beauty of womanhood?... Is it to reveal a humble heart devoted to worshiping God? Or is it to call attention to herself, and flaunt her...beauty? Or worse, to attempt to allure men sexually? A woman who focuses on worshiping God will consider carefully how she is dressed, because her heart will dictate her wardrobe and appearance.ⁱⁱ

Any conversation about modesty "starts in the intent of the heart." So consider for a moment, what is the intent of *your* heart in purchasing clothes to wear? Does a humble heart and a servant's heart dictate your wardrobe and appearance? Is your shopping informed and governed by modesty and restraint? Or is your dress motivated by a desire for attention and approval from others? Does your style reflect a lack of self-control?

There's an inseparable link between your heart and your clothes. Your clothes say something about your attitude. If they don't express a heart that is humble, that desires to please God, that longs to serve others, that's modest, that exercises self-control, then change must begin in the heart.

For modesty is humility expressed in dress.

The Appearance of the Modest Woman

What do humble, modest clothes look like? First Timothy 2:9 tells us: "Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel . . . not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire."

To better understand this verse, let's travel back in time to the early church. There had been some startling disruptions to the church's meetings of late, and Paul was writing to Timothy "so that . . . you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth" (1 Tim. 3:14-15).

Clearly some people were *not* behaving in a manner worthy of the church of the living God, thus necessitating this gracious rebuke from the apostle.

Paul begins, appropriately, with the men: “I desire that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling” (1 Tim. 2:8). He’s saying, “Guys, quit arguing in church! You’re distracting from worship, teaching and prayer. Anger is always wrong, but especially at church, the household *of God*, the church of the *living God*. So you need to stop fighting and start praying!”

Then, Paul addresses the women in the verse we just read (1 Tim 2:9). He is concerned because some of them are imitating the dress and adornment of the ladies of the Roman court and the prostitutes. Those women were known for their expensive clothes and jewelry and elaborate hairstyles; they dressed, not only to attract attention, but to seduce as well.

When the women of the church arrived dressed like this, it’s no surprise that they distracted others from worshipping God. What’s more, through their ostentatious dress they associated themselves with the wealthy (thus separating themselves from the poor) and the ungodly (thus distancing themselves from their fellow church members). Their dress was distracting, and maybe even divisive.

That’s why Paul urges them to dress in “respectable apparel” and “not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire.” He wants the Savior, not seductive style, to be the focus of the church gathering—and indeed, the focus of all of life.

So the real issue wasn’t actually braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly attire. The issue was—and is—clothing that associates with worldly and not godly values: clothes that say “look at me” and “I’m with the world.”

Let me be clear: Paul is not categorically prohibiting a woman from enhancing her appearance---on Sunday or any day of the week. In fact, you’ll find other places in Scripture where godly women wore fine clothing and jewelry.

The woman of noble character in Proverbs 31 dressed in colorful and high-quality clothing (31:22). Likewise the bride in the Song of Solomon adorned herself with jewelry (1:10). Esther had twelve months of beauty treatments (Est. 2:12). Obviously God isn’t opposed to women making themselves beautiful.

In fact, as my wife Carolyn has observed:

God is the creator of beauty. God delights in beauty. All we need to verify this fact is to consider the beauty He created all around us: whether it is an elegant flower, or towering trees, or a meandering river, or billowy clouds or the majestic night sky. Every time we stop to take in one of these breathtaking scenes on display in God’s creation, we can’t help but be convinced that He delights in beauty!

[B]ecause we are created in the image of our Creator, each of us has this propensity to make things beautiful. That means, when we decorate our homes, or plant a lovely flower garden, or seek to add some form of beauty to our surroundings, even when we attempt to enhance our personal appearance—we are actually imitating and delighting in the works of our Great Creator.ⁱⁱⁱ

I admire my wife's feminine desire for beauty and her ability to make herself and her surroundings attractive. A woman can honor God by enhancing her personal appearance or bringing beauty to her environment.

John Angell James agrees, with qualification:

This taste [for beauty], however in many cases it may be altogether corrupted in its object, wrong in its principle, or excessive in its degree, is in its own nature an imitation of the workmanship of God, who, "by his spirit has garnished the heavens," and covered the earth with beauty.^{iv}

Mr. James is right. A woman's taste for beauty can be an imitation of God's character, but it can also become corrupted. And such was the case in this first-century church. Paul exhorted the women who professed godliness: "You should not dress in a way that resembles those who are extravagant, or worse, intent on being seductive or sexy. You must not identify with the sinful, worldly culture through your dress." Paul was writing not to condemn attractive attire but to address its corruption by association with worldly ideals and goals.

This truth has timeless relevance. Consider, who inspires *your* attire? Who are you identifying with through your appearance? Who are you trying to imitate or be like in your dress?

Does your hairstyle, clothing, or any aspect of your appearance reveal an excessive fascination with sinful cultural values? Are you preoccupied with looking like the latest *American Idol* winner, or the actresses on magazine covers, or the immodest woman next door? Are your role models the godly women of Scripture or the worldly women of our culture?

The women in the church should not look exactly like the ungodly, seductive women in the world. Women in the church are to be different. They should stand out not because of their revealing clothing but because of their distinctly modest heart and dress.

A Pastor's Concern

It's been almost two thousand years since Paul penned his letter, but 1 Timothy 2:9 remains a pastoral concern. Today the issue is immodest and sensual clothing more than ostentatious attire. And it's no small challenge to address this matter. I know the great risk for offense or misunderstanding that I take by broaching this topic, the potential that you may feel I am sinfully judging or wrongly accusing.

Please know that I don't write as a self-appointed critic. I am simply a concerned pastor who charitably assumes that most Christian women who dress immodestly are ignorant of the war with lust that men confront on a daily basis. They probably don't have a clue what goes on in a man's mind and what effect their bodies have on the eyes and hearts of men young and old.

But I want no one to be ignorant after reading this chapter. That's why I want you to hear from two young men who represent countless others. I hope their struggles and temptations — which are not unique, but common to men — will motivate you to pursue modesty and self-control for the sake of your brothers in Christ. First, a day in the life of a college student pursuing purity:

Each and every day on campus is a battle. A battle against my sin, a battle against temptation, a battle against my depraved mind. Every morning I have to cry out for mercy, strength, and a renewed conviction to flee youthful lust. The Spirit is faithful to bring me the renewal I need and to prepare me to do war against my sin, yet temptations still exist.

I'm thankful God has created me to be attracted to women. However, campus is a loaded minefield. There are girls everywhere, and it is guaranteed that I will pass some attractive girls as I walk in between classes. To make it through the day unscathed, I either have to be actively engaging my mind and spirit in praying, quoting Scripture, listening to worship music, or looking at the sidewalk. Many days it takes all four to be safe. . . .

The thing that women do not seem to fully grasp is that the temptation toward lust does not stop. It is continual. It is aggressive. And it does all it can to lead men down to death. And women have a choice to help or deter the goal and purpose of lust. Sometimes when I see a girl provocatively dressed, I'll say to myself, "She probably doesn't even know that 101 guys are going to devour her in their minds today. But then again, maybe she does." To be honest, I don't know the truth, the truth of why she chooses to dress the way she does, the way she chooses to walk, the way she chooses to act. I don't know because I've never sat down with a girl and asked why. All I need to know is that the way she presents herself to the world is bait for my sinful mind to latch onto and I need to avoid it at all costs.

For the most part, the church serves as a sanctuary from the continual barrage of temptation toward sin. However, the church's members are not yet free from sin, and there are girls who are ignorant and unaware of men's sinful tendencies.

I must confess that even church can have several mines scattered about. To the girls who are ignorant, please serve your brother in Christ and have your dad screen your wardrobe. Ask your dad how you can better choose holiness over worldliness. He's a guy, and he knows more than you on the issue.

And to the girls who don't follow the pattern of the world: thank you. Thank you a million times over. You are following Scripture's commands, and you are helping your brothers in the process.

I commend this young man's tenacious fight for holiness. And I echo his gratitude to all women who choose to dress modestly—*thank you a million times over*. You're truly serving your brothers in Christ by your obedience to God's Word.

As Christian women in the church you can be either a blessing or a distraction as the second young man explains:

The one place I might think I wouldn't have to face as much temptation is at church. But this is not always the case. When ladies I'm friends with dress immodestly, it definitely has a negative effect on our friendship. When she dresses immodestly, it doesn't make it easy to see her as a sister in Christ. There's a constant battle going on as I'm interacting with her. Communication becomes more difficult, but I'm also trying to fight temptation.

I also think that some ladies aren't aware that even the little things can distract guys a lot — showing even a little part of their stomach, wearing a bag that has a strap that goes between their breasts, etc.

I'm so grateful for the friendships God has given me over the last year and a half and for the godly ladies in my small group. I'm so appreciative of the sacrifice that these ladies make to glorify God and to serve and care for the guys.

I heard a story of one of the ladies in our small group who went shopping and really liked a shirt she was trying on. But then she thought, "No, I can't do this to the guys." That was the first time I had ever heard of anything like that, and it made me so grateful. It is such a blessing to have friends who care for me enough to be selfless and to sacrifice what might look attractive in order to help me and other guys with sexual lust.

When ladies dress modestly, it's attractive and it makes me want to hang out with them. I think modesty is so attractive and helpful in friendships; it makes it easier for a friendship to be centered around God and for fellowship to be unhindered.

Godly men find modesty attractive. They appreciate women who dress with self-control and restraint. They're grateful for women who serve them by helping them fight the temptation to lust.

After hearing about these young men's struggles, one young woman wrote to me:

I had a vague idea that guys were more affected by sight than girls were. But I never realized how pervasive the temptation was. . . . Now, knowing a little bit of what guys go through every day, I have an ardent desire to serve my brothers in Christ. I want to make the church a haven for them.

Thanks to my parents' oversight, I don't think my wardrobe is immodest. But I can often spend too much time critiquing my outfit, trying to figure out how I can work with what I have to get guys' attention. After your message, I no longer have the desire to dress immodestly—rather, my concern is to protect the guys and help them in their walk with God. I don't want my clothes or behavior to distract them from focusing on God.

I hope this ardent desire to serve your brothers in Christ characterizes every woman in the church. But the church should also be a place where the unconverted can come dressed immodestly and be warmly welcomed, not self-righteously judged. Among Christian women, those who dress immodestly should be graciously corrected—not by self-righteous people trying to impose personal preferences, but by those who consider themselves to be the worst sinners they know, and charitably assume ignorance on the part of the immodest. Modesty isn't the exclusive responsibility of the church's pastors and wives. It is the collective responsibility of all members of the church.

A Word to Fathers

Dads, I want to urge you to take responsibility for your daughters' dress. Fathers are absolutely essential to the cultivation of modesty. When a young lady dresses immodestly, it usually means her father has failed to lead, care for and protect her. Without a father's care and protection, she may be daily exposed to the lustful minds of men.

My three daughters are grown and married now, but from an early age I sought to impress upon them the importance of modesty. Before an article of clothing became a permanent part of their wardrobe my girls had to get my approval. This wasn't always easy—for them or for me. Modest clothing is hard to find. Sometimes, they'd arrive home after an all day shopping trip only to hear me say: "That's not gonna, work, my love. I'm so sorry, but exhaustion from shopping doesn't excuse immodesty. We're not going to compromise."

Here's what my daughter Nicole wrote about how my wife and I led her and her sisters:

My parents were committed to raising modest daughters. They educated us about how men are stimulated visually. They examined any article of clothing that came into the house, giving it a thumbs up or sending us straight back to the store with the receipt. I'll admit it was frustrating to spend hours at the mall and have nothing to show for it. There were moments when that frivolous, selfish desire for cool, tight jeans overtook my desire to serve others. That's when Mom and Dad would remind me of the young men who were trying to glorify God. My clothes could either help or hinder them. When they put it like that, I was quickly saddened by my selfishness.^v

We must not simply oversee our daughter's closets; we must teach them God's perspective of modest dress, and educate them about the temptations of men. And we must have clear standards, informed by Scripture and not culture. This will make it easier for them to follow our leadership when difficult choices are necessary.

Author Nancy Leigh DeMoss provides a two simple criterion for modesty: Women should avoid "exposing intimate parts of the body" or "emphasizing private or alluring parts of the body." My wife and daughters (at my request) have compiled more specific suggestions in their Modesty Heart Check (See Appendix A.)^{vi}

Ultimately, fathers, your job to raise a modest daughter culminates and concludes on her wedding day.

Several years ago, my friend Lance Quinn asked Carolyn and me to teach at a weekend retreat to his congregation, The Bible Church of Little Rock. One of the messages he asked me to share was on this topic of modesty. At the conclusion of the sermon, the church's worship pastor, Todd Murray, presented an additional appeal to the congregation. He urged all girls to consider modesty even when shopping for formal attire and wedding dresses. His words were laden with care and compassion, yet they carried an appropriate soberness. Here's a little of what he said:

Ladies, please don't forget to apply these principles of modesty to formal events and weddings. In recent years I have become increasingly grieved by the immodest dresses of both brides and bridesmaids at the weddings that I officiate. I have observed a number of young ladies in our fellowship who have dressed modestly all their lives appearing on their wedding day in extremely provocative dresses, exposing more of themselves than on any other day of their lives.

I assume the best about what is going on in the hearts of these young women. I don't think that they went to the wedding dress shop determined to be provocative. No doubt, they just wanted a dress that would be elegant on this day that they have dreamed of all their lives. When a bride and mother set out on their expedition to find a wedding dress, they are, quite naturally, thinking like . . . women! Unfortunately, there is no one in the shop who is thinking like a man.

I'd like to make a radical proposal, girls. Why not take your father with you to the wedding boutique? If that thought is just too much for you (or your dad!) at least consider taking the dress out on approval and allowing your dad to see it before you make your final purchase.

Todd's proposal might be radical by cultural standards, but it is the biblical norm. The standard of modesty and self-control shouldn't change on your daughter's wedding day. If anything, it should be even more important to honor God on that momentous occasion.

Having three married daughters, I know the challenges involved in finding modest wedding attire. However, with a lot of time and effort, it can be done. As Todd mentioned, the dad's role is crucial in this process. I helped our daughters by providing guidelines for appropriate bridal wear as they went shopping with their mom and then giving final approval to their choices. (You can find helpful guidelines to consider when purchasing a modest wedding gown, in Appendix B.)

Once again, please be on guard against the temptation to be self-righteous toward those who choose differently. If you think a bride is dressed immodestly, her wedding day isn't the appropriate occasion to comment on her dress. Simply rejoice with her in the goodness of God displayed in her marriage.

But if you're a bride-to-be, or the father of a daughter who's preparing to get married, I hope these thoughts serve you in your effort to plan a ceremony that brings glory to God.

The Right Adornment

Notice in 1 Timothy 2 that Paul goes beyond addressing a woman's apparel. He says he desires "that women should adorn themselves . . . with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works" (2:9–10).

He's very clear about what makes a godly woman attractive. "Good works" are to be what's most noticeable about a woman who professes godliness. Not her wardrobe, but her good works—an observable lifestyle of serving others. That's the appropriate adornment for women who profess to be Christians. And it is an evidence of the transforming effect of the gospel.

This may mean less time applying makeup, styling hair and choosing clothes. It may mean more time sacrificing on behalf of your family and your local church.

Adorning yourself with good works means less time shopping and more time serving. So, which are you more preoccupied with — shopping or good works?

Now, this is not a categorical criticism of shopping. The four women in my life think shopping is a gift from God. It's probably no surprise that I don't view shopping as favorably as they do. I would argue that shopping is actually a product of the fall. But that's because I'm a man. And as a man, I don't shop. If I go to the mall, it's to enter one store and buy one specific item. I'm not really "going to the mall"; I'm not walking in and out of various stores depending on what catches my eye. No. I'm on a mission to get a single item and get out of there as quickly as I can.

But for women, as I understand it, shopping can be a relaxing and enjoyable experience, a gift from God. But that gift, like any gift, can become an idol.

John Piper writes about coming across a review of the book *The Body Project* by Joan Jacobs Brumberg. This book looks extensively at a century's worth of changes in how girls view themselves. In the introduction, the author contrasts the diary of an adolescent in 1892 with that of a teenage girl in the 1990s. The girl in 1892 wrote this:

Resolved, not to talk about myself or feelings. To think before speaking. To work seriously. To be self restrained in conversation and actions. Not to let my thoughts wander. To be dignified. Interest myself more in others.

The 1990s teenager wrote this:

I will try to make myself better in any way I possibly can with the help of my budget and baby-sitting money. I will lose weight, get new lenses, already got new haircut, good makeup, new clothes and accessories.

The book's back cover summarizes what was true a century ago:

The ideal of the day . . . was inner beauty: a focus on good deeds and a pure heart. In contrast, the environment for girls today is “a new world” of sexual freedom and consumerism—a world in which the body is their primary project.^{vii}

This cultural shift — from good works to good looks — parallels the departure from godliness to worldliness. Women who are professing Christians must be discerning enough to resist and reject that shift.

So, what are you consumed with—your clothing or your character? What are you known for—your good looks or your good works? If you're a mother, what is your daughter learning from you in this regard? She's surely studying you; as she does so, what is she learning— the latest fashions or good deeds?

Once again, let me remind you that the Bible doesn't forbid a woman from enhancing her appearance. But here in 1 Timothy 2, Paul isn't just advocating modesty in dress; he's insisting that more time and energy be devoted to spiritual adornment in the form of good works. And he's warning about excessive attention devoted to appearance to the neglect of good works.

The Modest Woman's Allegiance

Remember Jenni from the beginning of the chapter? A friend graciously confronted her concerning her immodest dress, and encouraged her to take a closer look at what God's Word had to say about modesty. When Jenni pasted 1 Timothy 2:9 back into her Bible and began applying its truth to her heart and life, her perspective of modesty and eventually her wardrobe underwent a complete transformation:

As my friend shared her concern and listed specific articles of clothing that drew attention to my body, I was sobered. Lord, is it pride that motivates the way I dress? Does what I wear actually cause my brothers to stumble? Do I bring reproach to your name? I immediately acknowledged my desperation before God and began to plead for His mercy and grace to reveal the sin within my heart and assist me to change.

I began to study God's Word, read material addressing this issue, and listen to C. J. Mahaney's teaching on "The Soul of Modesty." By the grace of God, there was no resistance in my heart but a passion to change. God illuminated the simple fact that it is my heart that dictates my appearance and wardrobe. I was faced with the question, "What statement do my clothes make concerning my heart?" The pride and ambition to exalt self were made very clear. My motives for the way I dressed were to promote self rather than Jesus Christ.

I began to understand the heart and soul of modesty. Modesty is humility expressed in dress, a desire to serve others, neither promoting nor provoking sensuality or lust. It is rooted in a desire to lose any and all consideration of self and live hidden behind the cross of Christ. I became more and more aware that my dress was not an outward expression of the gospel or humility. I began by aggressively examining my wardrobe.

My husband, Jon, and I spent a lengthy period of time examining every article of clothing, prayerfully considering which pieces were inappropriate. By the end of the examination my wardrobe had considerably diminished.

To be honest, this has not been easy. Even though it has been a year since cleaning out my closet, there are still many moments when I struggle picking out my outfit for the day, being dissatisfied with my limited wardrobe. It has been crucial for me to question my motives morning after morning, which helps me to see that what is most attractive is my desire to please God, not my outward appearance.

It is something that I must daily fight — to flee worldly desires and pursue godliness in this area. This requires daily application and frequent reminders. I have had the "Modesty Heart Check" posted inside the bathroom vanity so that it can serve as a reminder every morning before I leave the house. I have identified specific areas where I am uniquely tempted and then spent time purposing how I need to change. And when I purchase clothing, I always show my husband, Jon, to be sure that it is modest.

Dressing modestly blesses my husband because it is a way that I can save myself and my body for him alone. And it also serves the other men around me by helping to guard their hearts against temptation. By pursuing modesty in spirit as well as in dress, I can bring glory to Christ and further the gospel.

Some of you may wonder, like Jenni once did, why make such a big deal about modesty.? More importantly, why does Paul? Is it because we're conservative people? Is it because we have personal preferences about how women should dress?

No. The reason is the gospel. Modesty is important because of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's why Paul is concerned about it. He isn't simply a "cultural conservative." This isn't Paul's version of *The Book of Virtues*. For him, the issue of modesty is about the gospel.

And that's why you should be concerned about modesty as well. For when we take a broader look at 1 Timothy 2:9, we discover that these instructions about women's dress are set in the context of the gospel:

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Tim. 2:3–6)

The gospel message is the motivation for modest dress.

The woman who loves the Savior avoids immodesty because she doesn't want to distract from or reflect poorly upon the gospel.

R. Kent Hughes puts it like this: "Paul's overriding concern was that the way Christians deported themselves would not detract from but enhance their gospel mission."^{viii}

We have a gospel mission: not only to preach Christ but to live in a way consistent with our profession of faith. As women, you can detract from the gospel mission by dressing immodestly, or you can enhance the gospel mission by dressing in a way that reflects the transforming power of the gospel at work in you. The humble woman, the modest woman, is concerned about the lost. And her dress reflects that concern.

Make this your aim: that there be no contradiction between your gospel message and the clothes you wear. May your modest dress be a humble witness to the One who gave himself as a ransom for all.

Discussion Questions

For Your Mind

- 1) Read 1 Timothy 2:3–10. What do these verses say about the motivation for modest dress?
- 2) How do we know that 1 Timothy 2:9 does not prohibit women from making themselves beautiful?
- 3) How do women who dress modestly serve men?

For Your Heart

- 4) Who are you trying to imitate or identify with through your appearance — godly women, or women of the world?
- 5) This chapter notes that your wardrobe is a public statement of your personal and private motivation. What does your clothing communicate about your motivations and priorities?
- 6) Think of a woman who is admired for her godly character and good works. What aspects of her godliness do you particularly want to emulate?

For Your Life

- 7) What about your wardrobe may need to change so that your appearance can better reflect the transforming power of the gospel?
- 8) What steps can you take on your next shopping trip to ensure that your clothing purchases reflect humility, modesty, and self-control? (Some ideas: Pray for God's help and provision in finding modest clothing; check each article of clothing you try on for modesty as well as fit; ask your father, husband, or a trusted friend to evaluate items you're not sure about.)
- 9) Mothers, what steps can you take to train your daughters to value godliness over fashion, to nurture humility and self-control, and to wear clothing that reflects these virtues? Fathers, what steps can you take to care for and lead your daughters in humility, self-control, and modesty?

Endnotes

- ⁱ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 133.
- ⁱⁱ John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentaries (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 80–81.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Carolyn Mahaney, “Fashion and Following the Savior, Pt. 4,” http://girltalk.blogs.com/girltalk/2006/04/fashion_and_fol_4.html.
- ^{iv} James Angell James, *Female Piety* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1860; repr. 1995).
- ^v Carolyn Mahaney and Nicole Mahaney Whitacre, *Girl Talk: Mother-Daughter Conversations on Biblical Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 141.
- ^{vi} The “Modesty Heart Check” is also available at the girltalk web site — www.girltalk.blogs.com.
- ^{vii} Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project* (New York: Random House, 1997).
- ^{viii} John Stott, *Guard the Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 157.