

Modesty: Not Just a Women's Issue

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I recently read an article about modesty that prompted me to write this post. The article says that women, particularly young women, should dress modestly to keep their brothers from stumbling into sin. I've talked that way in the past, and I've even taught it, but I've come to believe that it's not helpful. Biblical modesty is really about humility and the glory of God.

1. Modesty as Humility. Often when Christians speak of modesty, they speak in terms of dress, but in reality, modesty is about not "showing off" any of your attractive qualities in words or deeds. It's about refusing to set yourself above others and refusing to draw attention to yourself as an end. Modesty means not bragging about our work accomplishments, not showing off how intelligent we are, or even how "godly" we are, and it also means not showing off our physical bodies. Modesty means that we regard others as more important than ourselves and refuse to make ourselves out to look better than others.

2. Modesty is a Matter of the Gospel. Because of Christ's imputed righteousness, we don't have anything to prove to anyone. We are clothed in His holy robes of perfect obedience, which means we don't have to grasp for the high opinions of men, the attraction of others, or for feelings of superiority over them. As believers in Jesus, we already have Him and all things in Him. Jesus says we will inherit the earth. We are seated in the heavenly places with Christ. God says we are "righteous" and that we are His "sons." It really doesn't matter what others say or think about us and it doesn't matter whether others desire us. God wants us. He accepts us freely. Therefore, we can be modest.

3. Be Very Careful How You Motivate Modesty. It's dangerous to tell a young woman, "Dress modestly so you don't cause a man to stumble into sin." She cannot cause a man to stumble into sin. Men sin because men are sinners and because they choose to sin. His sin is not her fault. His sin his fault, no matter how she dresses. It's a characteristic of abusers to say, "If you didn't do this or that, then I wouldn't have acted like I did." It's blame-shifting. This is a harmful way to motivate a person, and frankly, legitimizes the mindset of abusers. It teaches a woman to accept blame for a man's sins. The truth is that if a man wants to sin by looking at a woman, he can do that no matter how she is dressed. Ultimately, every man and woman is responsible for themselves to turn away from temptation. Job said that he made a covenant with his eyes, not to gaze at a virgin. Our sinful actions cannot be blamed on that which tempts us. Our sin is our own fault. And we are responsible to flee temptation.

4. Love Motivates Modesty. We should be modest, or humble, because we love God and because we want to show His love to others. This applies equally to men and to women. Yes, certainly, we should cover our bodies so as not to tempt others to sin. In the same way, we should conceal our knowledge and not brag about our accomplishments. Many times, women get the brunt of the counsel to be modest: cover up so as not to tempt men to sin. But men need exactly the same counsel. Men need to cover their bodies so as not to tempt women or even men to sin. In our highly sexualized society, men and women are dressing in more and more sexually provocative ways. Therefore, love requires that we take care not to proudly put any of our qualities on display and to love others by refusing to be immodest, and dressing modestly.

5. God's Glory is the Highest Motive. Ultimately, the reason we should not brag, or show off, or exalt ourselves in any way is that God alone is worthy of glory. As Christians, we seek His glory, not our own. This requires that we acknowledge that everything we have comes down from Him; therefore,

there is no room for boasting in anything. We should give thanks to God for all things. And we should give glory to Him for all that we are and all that we have because He alone is worthy.