

Immodest Apparel In the Church

by Harold Hancock

Fashions often include dresses that are too short, blouses cut too low, skirts that are strategically split too high, bare midriffs or backs, etc. Furthermore, this time of year, the warm weather and sports events encourage people to adorn swim suits, shorts that are too tight and too short, halter tops, etc. This manner of dress is immodest when worn in public. It is shameful that people in the world dress this way; it is inexcusable that Christians do it! Yet, it happens. Some members of the church are even careless in their dress when they attend worship services and Bible study.

Many times these fashions are designed to be provocative and are worn either for that purpose or with the knowledge of their effect. The wearers often intend to or know they will attract the sensuous glances and stares of the opposite sex. This attire will either expose enough to satisfy "eyes full of adultery," furnish a view that incites lustful imaginations and unwholesome thoughts, or cause the godly to struggle to keep their minds pure. Those who deny the motives, consciousness, or effects of those who wear immodest apparel are either dangerously naive or shamefully dishonest.

Paul instructed Christian women to dress modestly (*kosmios*), with shamefastness (*aidos*), and with sobriety (*sophrosune*) (1 Timothy 2:9). These instructions demand that Christians, especially Christian women, dress decently; they must dress in a way not to bring shame but honor to themselves and with good judgment and a constant rein on all passions and desires. Decent dress is demanded by a good heart and good character. Christians should desire to please God more than they desire to be fashionable or popular or to attract the attention of those of the opposite sex.

"Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush . . ." (Jeremiah 8:12).

The problem of immodesty in the church suggests that some Christians are still worldly in heart. Get the heart right, and the dress will be right.

Modest Quotes! Three Words

1. **MODEST (KOSMIOS)** - "Orderly, well-arranged, decent, modest, is used in 1 Tim. 2:9 of the apparel with which Christian women are to adorn themselves; in 1 Tim. 3:2, of one of the qualifications essential for a bishop or overseer." (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vol. 3, p. 79). The term, then, concerns the inner orderliness and decency reflected in her dress and conduct.

2. **SHAMEFASTNESS (AIDOS)** - "A sense of shame, modesty, is used regarding the demeanour of women in the church, 1 Tim. 2:9." (ibid. Vol. 4, p.17). "Shamefastness

is that modesty which is "fast" or rooted in the character." (Davies, Bible English, p. 12, quoted in Vine's). This is the word rendered "reverence" in Heb. 12:28. There it refers to suitable awe and respect toward God. In our passage it refers to a woman's own self-respect related to her reverence for God. Many of the fashions today tend to make people look grotesque and reflect a woeful lack of self-respect. It seems that some compete to see who can look the most absurd, and the farthest from sanity or reason. Some are embarrassed not in the least. The ability to blush is a vanishing virtue with many.

3. **SOBRIETY (SOPHROSUNE)** - "Soberness, sound judgment." (Vine, Vol. 4, P. 44-45). "That habitual inner self-government, with its constant rein on all the passions and desires, which would hinder the temptation to these from arising." (Thayer). "Soundness of mind, self-control, sobriety." (Thayer, p. 613). Berry's Interlinear translates the word with "discreetness." (taken from *Modest Apparel* by Connie Adams, The Manslick Road Bulletin, May 4, 1990).

"Even conservative bathing suits are hardly modest, and seem more suggestive of shamelessness than of shamefastness. They are scarcely more than the fig leaves which God considered inadequate." (From *What About Mixed Swimming?* by Dee Bowman, July 27, 1994).

"Men and women are so made that the sight of (and contact with) bare flesh in the opposite sex is exciting. We would like for some who 'think nothing of it' to explain the extreme popularity of the bathing suit issue of Sports Illustrated. Is the sight of a woman in a bathing suit more titillating in a magazine than in the flesh?" (Ibid).

"Whosoever said that 'clothes do not make the man' may have been right, but it is also true that clothes may be a reflection of the man (or woman). The way that we dress sends certain signals about ourselves. This is why godly women should dress 'as women professing godliness' (1 Tim.2:10)." (From *Indecent Dress* (1) by Edward O. Bagwell, Sr.).