

## People Husbandry Through the Word

*Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. (1 Timothy 2:9-15 NASB95)*

In a 'Gates of Eden' publication of May-June 2005, volume 11 number 3, a Brother John Robinson wrote an article titled 'People Husbandry.' In it, he made many good points concerning modesty and the related moral disintegration connected with the current lack of it in our society. His conclusion was for husbands to pay more attention to their roles as caretakers of the weaker vessels (the women), honoring and protecting them by (presumably and among other things) requiring a more modest form of clothing. It was a good message, one we need to hear and heed, because the world is like a ship that is sinking through a multitude of small holes representing tiny lapses in morality. Get enough of the little holes and you won't need one big one to sink it. Husbands have a duty to plug as many of the holes as they can within their authority. Our women are precious and valuable, and husbands, or caretakers as Brother Robinson points out, should take care to protect and guard the precious lives entrusted to us.

Unfortunately, while he helps husbands identify the problems, and exhorts us to constructively use our positions as caretakers to address them, he spent very little time telling us *how* (although there is only so much one can put in an article). God's Word is authoritative, not man's opinions, so can we find explicit instructions for clothing in the Bible? How about immodesty, or modesty? Well, to start with the Word tells us that in the beginning, nakedness was okay.

*And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:25 NASB95)*

Then, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, something happened to change their awareness of nakedness, and the first clothing was invented. Pay attention to the fact that the designer clothes only covered the loin area, which we will cover a little bit more in a few paragraphs (I can't help it, I like puns).

*Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (Genesis 3:7 NASB95)*

The awareness of nakedness arose from the knowledge of good and evil, gained from eating the fruit God said not to eat.

*He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Genesis 3:10-11 NASB95)*

A little later, we find that the designer clothing was not adequate in God's opinion, so He designed something better.

*The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. (Genesis 3:21 NASB95)*

It looks like the Word is teaching us that external appearance, in the form of clothing or adornment, is a sign of an internal condition. Adam and Eve *knew* they were naked, and took steps to correct it. Going without clothing (being uncovered) had become shameful. When shame entered the picture, their answer was to cover up and hide from God. However, their idea of a covering was not the same as God's. They had a knowledge of good and evil, but they really didn't know what to do with it. In other words, in spite of their new-found 'knowledge,' they were dumber than rocks when it came to the knowledge of how to deal with their nakedness. God had to provide garments for them that were more acceptable than the fig-leaf loincloths they made for themselves. We don't know why exactly; perhaps it was simply a matter of durability or comfort. It is unwise to read more into this incident than is warranted, but it gives us a good start on the concept of nakedness and covering. Let's keep going to see if we can flesh out (I told you I like puns) the picture.

One reference tells us that nakedness is the reason for not building an altar with steps.

*'And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it.'* (Exodus 20:26 NASB95)

This applies to men, because they were the only ones who could minister at the altar. It seems that whatever was worn by men during this time period gave them 'freedom' in such a way that going up steps would reveal too much to the unwary. This implies that men wore something like a dress ("It's not a dress, it's a kilt!") and that 'going commando' (without underwear) was commonplace. It might also mean that the skirts were short, otherwise how would you see?

Another reference records for us that sometimes there was a God-sanctioned reason for going naked.

*In the year that the commander came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him and he fought against Ashdod and captured it, at that time the Lord spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go and loosen the sackcloth from your hips and take your shoes off your feet." And he did so, going naked and barefoot. And the Lord said, "Even as My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot three years as a sign and token against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. (Isaiah 20:1-4 NASB95)*

The majority of references to nakedness and clothes in the Scriptures are linked in some fashion to the concept of idolatry, particularly Israel's. From these, it looks like nakedness (and related concepts such as harlotry and fornication) is a figurative way of describing idolatrous behavior. Idolatry, at its' foundation, can be defined as a refusal to do what God says to do. Instead, the idolater does what some other person or god says to do. This is why I think Adam and Eve were ashamed of (or in) their nakedness – because they had decided to turn away from God and do their own thing. They knew they had sinned against Him (one of the unanticipated side effects

of going your own way) and they knew how far they had fallen. Their sin, and their shame, in essence, was the worship of other gods.

It seems, too, that nakedness is really just the groin area (loins), according to references such as Genesis 3:7 and Isaiah 20 (above) along with many other Scriptures. The understanding that I am getting from the Word is that nakedness is primarily idolatry through disobedience. It is also the physical lack of clothing, and the groin areas are the critical areas to cover. In the section of the Pentateuch concerning acceptable relations between relatives, nakedness refers to the sex act, by association with the genital areas (Leviticus 18). The “source of her flow” in Leviticus 20:18 is even more specific. It’s possible that clothing is intended to cover more than just the groin area – the Word is just not very specific. There is no command I can find anywhere in the Word that tells us exactly how much to cover, but that could be because it assumes we know already, or because what is given in the Word is enough of a guideline.

I did find some references to specific clothing in a few places. One is in Deuteronomy 22:5 where God’s children are told not to wear the clothing of the opposite gender. The down side of this is, we don’t know from this what gender-specific clothing was in that day and age. But apparently God wears a skirt (at least figuratively).

*“Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,” declares the Lord God. (Ezekiel 16:8 NASB95)*

So does Boaz (Ruth 3:1-10). I understand the above reference is saying that God’s Laws (His skirt) cover His people. This is probably due to turning from idolatry (nakedness) to God, by following God’s ways instead of pagan ways.

A similar reference is in Nahum. Here though, lifting the skirts seems like a figure of speech for the nakedness of idolatry.

*“Behold, I am against you,” declares the Lord of hosts; “And I will lift up your skirts over your face, And show to the nations your nakedness And to the kingdoms your disgrace. (Nahum 3:5 NASB95)*

This reference includes both men and women, and is perhaps more specific about what people wore. Either this is completely figurative (referring only to idolatry), which is possible, or both genders wore something we might call a skirt. Maybe it was just the Nineveh-ites, but I suspect it was more universal. Apparently David wore something like a skirt in 1 Samuel 6:12-23. Revelation 7:9-10 tells us that one day we will all be wearing robes again. So far it seems like the Word, if it teaches anything about clothing, is teaching at the minimum that people back then all wore robes or skirts.

Nowadays, some think that a woman should wear only long skirts, while it is okay for men to wear pants. The problem is, I couldn’t find any Scriptural reason for this. If it is wrong for women to wear pants (and I don’t think that it is) then it is wrong for men also. If it’s okay for men, ergo, it’s okay for women. It seems rather arbitrary to teach otherwise, and I hesitate to tell husbands that we get the luxury of picking and choosing what is modest and what is not according to our own limited sensibilities. If we are arbitrary in this, we come up with all sorts

of inconsistent rules having no biblical basis whatsoever. Then we expect those rules to be binding on others, when only the Word of God is binding.

Think back to the time of Mt. Sinai, and the giving of the instructions on how to run a godly community (the Law). What were the people wearing? All of them, men and women, wore, as near as I can tell, robes. So in a sense, everyone wore long skirts. When we were given the command not to wear clothing of the opposite gender (Deuteronomy 22:5), how could people tell what belonged to one gender or the other? One way, I suggest, to tell genders apart was long hair on the women, and beards with shorter hair for men. But this is not legislated for us anywhere. Another way to tell must have been style or maybe even color differences which were clearly masculine and feminine. The mere presence of long skirts (since everybody wore them) did not serve to differentiate between the genders. There is no Scriptural warrant for teaching that pants are related to morality or modesty one way or the other.

Head coverings are another item of clothing that is advocated by some people to enhance a woman's modesty. The problem is, there is no such advocacy in the Word. The only reference to a 'covering' for women in the Word is 1 Corinthians 11:1-16, but the text is clear that this is long hair.

*Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. (1 Corinthians 11:14-15 NASB95)*

The addition of a covering seems to be for addressing the lack of long hair a woman normally has. Paul is very specific in saying that "her hair is given to her for a covering." I have several problems with using this to teach that women should wear a small cloth on the head. First, there are no specifics, such as age or marital status of the wearer, or the size, color, or material, anywhere. Second, 'head' means all the way down to the neck, so if we want to be technical, a 'head covering' would extend over the face and down to the shoulders. If a woman wants to wear a scarf (or a veil), okay fine. If a husband wants his wife to wear a scarf (or if he wants to wear a kippah), okay fine. But if a person wants to teach that it is Scriptural, this is not okay fine. This is what is known as 'adding to' the Word.

In relation to this I did find six references to people wearing a veil, two which were negative and four which were neutral.

*She said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?" And the servant said, "He is my master." Then she took her veil and covered herself. (Genesis 24:65 NASB95)*

*So she removed her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, for she had covered her face. (Genesis 38:14-15 NASB95)*

*When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face*

*shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.*  
(Exodus 34:33-35 NASB95)

The three other neutral references apply to a bride (Song of Solomon 4:1, 4:3, 6:7). Two of the three quoted above are negative. Of the negatives, one applies to a male (Moses hiding the glory of God), one to a prostitute. Judah knew that Tamar was a prostitute because she had a 'head covering.' The other four apply to brides.

Other references make an analogy to death as a veil or covering over the nations (Isaiah 25:7); virgin daughters of Babylon are said to wear skirts, veils, and covered legs (Isaiah 47:1-2, where taking these off is analogous to idolatry); and in one place (Hebrews 10:20) the veil of the temple is an analogy for the flesh of the Christ. Paul speaks of the veil of Moses in a negative way (2 Corinthians 3:13-16) as covering the glory of the Messiah in the Law. Still, I could find nothing one way or the other in Scripture that teaches women should wear a piece of cloth on their heads for modesty's sake, or any other reason for that matter.

I suppose one conclusion we could draw from references presented so far is that people who have bare legs or other bare places are, by definition, idolatrous. This may be true. But how do we deal with idolatry? By telling people to cover up (the equivalent of giving them fig leaves)? Or by introducing them to the One True God by way of His Word? If it is true that an uncovered person might be an idolater, it is also true that just because a person is completely covered in clothes does not mean they are not idolaters. But all nakedness is not idolatry. At least two reasons it isn't are that God designed children to be born naked, and we are naked when we leave the world. The body we leave behind may have clothes on, but when we die we are going out just like we came in. Unless we have Jesus as a covering, there is nothing to stand between unrighteous people and a holy, just, and angry God.

While there isn't really much specific in the Word to help us figure out what is modest and what isn't, one of the main tasks of a leader (husband, caretaker) is to *make decisions*. Sometimes there is clear instruction from the Word to do this, and sometimes there is not. Sometimes we have to take a few different clues and weave them together into an understanding. Sometimes we have to change that understanding if new information is presented. If there are instructions in the Word, then we must be diligent to discover them and implement them. The 1 Timothy reference that Brother Robinson cites in his article (above) tells women to dress modestly, but gives no further instruction as to what modesty is in relation to clothing. As we have already seen there is no place in 1 Timothy or in the rest of the Scriptures that tells us whether or not a woman should wear long skirts, or pants, or a piece of cloth on the head. Or even what areas of the body to cover, other than the loins.

My opinion is, if there aren't clear instructions, we must make do with what 'seems right' to us, but also be very cautious about making extra-biblical rules. If a husband decides that he doesn't want his wife to wear pants, then a wife should respect his wishes. If she won't, her husband should have compassion and mercy for her while she is trying to figure things out (and helping her by showing her the Word – all the Word). Husbands are (or should be) trying to decide what is right as best they can. That doesn't mean the decision is necessarily biblical or has Scriptural authority, only that it is theirs to make. But this takes us to the next logical issue. For 'caretakers' to cause modesty to grow, do we upbraid the person who isn't dressed modestly

enough to suit our understanding? Should we proceed from the negative, essentially telling everybody in hearing what our own versions of modesty are and chastising those who don't conform? Or is there a better way? A few other Scriptures might help us husbands in determining how to proceed, even if there are no specifics.

*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9 NASB95)*

*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:14-16 NASB95)*

*You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:7-9 NASB95)*

"Whatsoever is true or pure" refers to the Word of God in all its' forms. "Be holy for I am holy" also refers to what is written. The second reference from Peter speaks of an internal solution, likewise pointing back to the Word of God, in my opinion. I have more to say on this shortly, but suffice it to point out now that the answer to modesty is not in the wearing of clothes. When husbands (or people in general) are trying to make decisions about what to do or how to behave like our Father desires, balancing His Words is the key. On the one hand, we are careful not to add our own rules in places where God is silent. On the other hand, we don't want to subtract from His Words and make them of no effect. He desires holiness, and compassion, and mercy, and justice, and love and so on.

I like long skirts on a woman. I think they have a 'swirly' look to them that complements a woman's natural femininity, just like long hair does. I do not like (well, okay, a part of me likes it, and that's not a pun) the short skirts and other revealing clothing that are so popular now. In a way, it's like an assault. I am forced to consider the physical charms of the female in question whether I want to or not. Frequently there is very little left to the imagination because it is all right out there in the open.

The funny thing is, women don't really dress for men; they dress for other women. I don't mean in a sexual way, I mean they are extremely conscious of other women's approval and acceptance. So they are more aware of style than a man is. There are also women who do not realize the full affect their appearance has on the males of the species. Some do, and try to use the effect in order to affect. Don't get me wrong; women who do this need an attitude adjustment. But most do not understand, at least not fully. If a woman's spouse is wise, he will educate her in the depth of some men's reactions, and help her exercise caution when picking out a wardrobe.

These things do not mean that women have excuses for dressing however they want, but they should factor into a man's understanding.

The fault for lust is not in women (or on them) it is in *men*. Men have a tendency to go overboard in blaming women for lust. Doesn't God see everything? So does He have a problem with nakedness? No, because He is holy. As we males should be also. I wasn't around then, but at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or just before, women wore long dresses all the time, and I understand a man could still get stirred up by the sight of a 'well-turned ankle.' I don't think it would matter if women wore burlap sacks so long they couldn't move – men (in general) would still find a way to express their lust. We are rather resourceful that way. In fact, even if a woman does wear a long skirt it rarely completely conceals all of her charms. I've seen lots of woman dressed relatively modestly who still move in delightfully feminine ways. It's not the femininity that is wrong (or my appreciation of it), it is the un-tempered male reaction that is wrong.

Jesus said once that "the prince of this world comes, but he has nothing in me" (John 14:30). I take this to mean that Satan had no lever to pull, no handle to grab, or no button he could push to move Jesus out of His holiness zone. What was inside of Jesus was a perfect understanding and acceptance of His Father's Words. My responsibility as a man and a husband is to make sure that I am so filled with the Word of God in a similar fashion that there is no reaction in me, other than perhaps appreciation, for those feminine charms.

*To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.* (Titus 1:15 NASB95)

I wish I was more immune (or more pure), but I'm working on making it better all the time.

It was said in the article by Brother Robinson that, "If you're not selling anything, don't advertise." This is true, as far as it goes. Women should not display their wares if they do not intend to complete a transaction. The problem is that an advertisement on her part doesn't require an automatic purchase on my part. If I'm driving around and see a sign on a restaurant showing a nice meal, I don't *have* to mindlessly swerve into the parking lot and buy three of them. If I see an invitation on a billboard to drink beer, I don't *have* to go down to the bar and get drunk. The implication that advertising is the cause of the male problem is wrong. It's not the invitation; it's the response. Saying the ad is at fault is called blame shifting, which didn't work with God in the Garden nor has it worked since.

It is good to consider what constitutes biblical modesty, and to work hard at honoring God and one another by implementing it. It is not so good, though, to have an unhealthy concentration on how other people interpret modesty, which leads to finger pointing or condemnation. Modesty has to be *learned* through God. Complaining at people who don't understand modesty is like spanking a child too long after a transgression – the connection is usually missed. The immodest person doesn't need a complaint, he or she needs the Word of God. God's Word is the only thing authoritative enough to effect change. My opinion, or your opinion, is just too weak. If God is gracious, His Word will do the work that needs to be done. Even then, it can take a while to sink in. I'm not saying we should condone any or all clothing styles; I'm saying that it takes a lot of effort to bridge the gap between what God requires and what people do. The answer to sin or sins is to wash with the Word of God.

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5:25-27 NASB95)*

More clothing would prevent lustful sins like a wedding ring prevents adultery. In the same way the presence or absence of gold on a finger doesn't matter to the parties who want to jump into the sack together, so clothes do not affect the heart. Usually the first person that needs the finger pointed at them is the one presuming to do the teaching. We need to make sure the log is out of our own eye before we start working on the splinter in the other guy's (or girl's).

Even if all the immodesty or sexual temptation is removed from direct line-of-sight, in most cases it still won't solve the problem, *because the problem is inside*, not outside. We could have women wearing burkhas (the head to toe sack that some Muslim women have to wear) all the time and it wouldn't be enough to remove the lust in a man's heart. The heart is the source of the lust, not the lack of clothing.

*"But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders." (Matthew 15:18-19 NASB95)*

Like a DEA canine which can find drugs no matter how deeply they are buried in a suitcase, willing men can sniff out opportunities in willing women to consummate lust no matter how they are covered. Blaming clothing for our response to exposed flesh is like blaming alcohol for drunkenness. The solution for a person's wrong behavior is to get more of the Word into the person. External solutions only cover up the problems, they don't solve them.

*I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:1-4 NASB95)*

Nakedness is not always wrong, and clothing is not always the answer for when it is. The God-given solution for plugging the hundreds of tiny leaks in our morality boat is His Word. May we come to understand as husbands or caretakers that the Word of God is living and active, and the only answer for sin is to allow the Word to do it's work in us.

*Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. (Revelation 22:14 NASB95)*

Shalom  
Bruce Scott Bertram