

What Does the Bible Say About Modesty?

God calls His people to live in a way that sets them apart from the world. Paul wrote, *"be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind"*

([Romans 12:1-2](#)). One of the plainest places this shows, or fails to show, is in how we dress. The Bible commands modest apparel, yet many treat modesty as a matter of opinion, settled by culture, taste, or how a person happens to feel. But would God give a command our souls depend on and then leave us to guess what He meant? He would not. He has told us, plainly enough for an honest heart to follow, what He counts as modest and what He counts as nakedness. Let us study it.

Modesty Is a Moral Law That Does Not Change

We should see first what kind of command this is. Some of God's commands have changed over time. The animal sacrifices and the incense of the old law are not required now, and would be wrong to offer. But the moral law has never changed. It was wrong to murder, to steal, to lie, and to commit adultery under the old covenant, and it is wrong still, because these laws are rooted in the character of God and in the way He made us. Modesty belongs to this second kind. It is tied to purity and to how God made us male and female, and so what God counted as modest in the beginning He counts as modest now. Fashions come and go. The will of God does not.

God Defines What Nakedness Is

The reason modesty is not left to opinion is that God Himself set the standard, and He set it early. When Adam and Eve sinned, they sewed fig leaves together and *"made themselves aprons"* ([Genesis 3:7](#)), a covering for the lower body. Yet even then Adam told God, *"I was afraid, because I was naked"* ([Genesis 3:10](#)). Their own covering had not undone their nakedness. So God clothed them Himself. *"Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them"* ([Genesis 3:21](#)). The word means a long garment reaching from the shoulders down past the hips. God covered more than they had covered, and He did it when there was no one else on earth to see. That tells us He was setting a standard, not solving a social problem.

He taught the same thing to the priests. They were to wear *"linen breeches to cover their nakedness; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach"* ([Exodus 28:42](#)), and the altar was to have no steps, *"that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon"* ([Exodus 20:26](#)), even though the priest already wore a robe. And when God pictured shame and disgrace through

Isaiah, He drew it as the baring of the thigh. *"make bare the leg, uncover the thigh... thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen"* ([Isaiah 47:2-3](#)). Put these together and the lesson is hard to miss. In God's sight, to expose the thigh and the private regions of the body is to be naked, whatever the world may call it. That is His definition, and it does not move.

Dress Comes From the Heart

Clothing is never only cloth. It says something about the heart underneath it. Paul joined modest dress to a modest spirit, calling for *"modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety"* ([1 Timothy 2:9](#)), and said it becomes *"women professing godliness"* ([1 Timothy 2:10](#)). Solomon described a woman known by *"the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart"* ([Proverbs 7:10](#)). The dress advertised the heart. Peter pointed the Christian woman to a better adorning, not the outward kind only, but *"the hidden man of the heart... a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price"* ([1 Peter 3:4](#)). Shamefacedness, the word Paul uses, means a modest and bashful spirit, and the person who has it will not be eager to bare the body. What we wear is finally a question of what we want to be seen, and why.

We Are Not to Cause Others to Stumble

There is more here than how a thing makes us feel. Immodesty can be a snare to others. Jesus said, *"whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart"* ([Matthew 5:28](#)). Men are stirred by what they see, and a person dressed to be looked at can kindle that fire in someone else. The Lord was severe about being the cause of another's sin. *"woe unto him, through whom they come"* ([Luke 17:1](#)). We are charged to see *"that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way"* ([Romans 14:13](#)). Job guarded even his eyes, *"I made a covenant with mine eyes"* ([Job 31:1](#)). It is true that some will lust no matter how carefully others dress, and we are not made guilty by another man's sin. But if we have draped ourselves to draw the eye and stir the flesh, we have had a hand in it. Love does not bait its brother.

The Standard Is God's Word, Not Culture or Comfort

Two objections come up here, and both miss the mark. The first says modesty is only custom, since there was a time when a bared ankle was thought improper. But notice the direction of that. Where the customs of a people call for more covering than God requires, a Christian may gladly wear more, for the sake of the gospel and his neighbor, as Paul became *"all things to all men, that I might by all means save some"* ([1 Corinthians 9:22](#)). To wear more than God requires, in order to give no offense, is no sin. The trouble runs the other way. Where the world says a person is decently dressed in far less than God allows, then *"we ought to obey God rather than men"*

([Acts 5:29](#)). The second objection says, it does not bother me. But our comfort is no measure of right and wrong. God once rebuked a people who had sinned so long they had lost the power to be ashamed, who "*could not blush*" ([Jeremiah 6:15](#)). We will not be judged by what we have grown used to, but by His word ([John 12:48](#)). The question is never what we can handle. It is what God has said.

What About Swimming?

All of this comes to a head at the swimming pool and the beach, so let us be clear and fair about it. The problem is not that men and women are in the water at the same time. Swimming is no sin, and there is nothing wrong with a family enjoying a lake or the sea together, or with friends doing the same. The problem is the dress, or rather the undress. What the world wears to swim bares the very thigh and body that God calls nakedness, and often clings tightly to whatever it does not bare. That would be the trouble whether anyone of the opposite sex were present or not.

So the answer is not to give up swimming, nor to say that men and women may never be in the water together. The answer is to be covered the way God says to be covered. A Christian can swim, and can take his family to the water, dressed modestly, covering what God covers. Change the clothing, not the company. A father does well to weigh this before he leads his wife and daughters out in what the world wears to the water. The fix is simple and within reach. Dress to honor God, even at the water's edge, and the day at the lake is no sin at all.

Transformed, Not Conformed

Modesty is not a list of rules made to take the joy out of life, and it is not about being odd for its own sake. It flows from a heart that has been given to God and wants to please Him, a heart transformed and not conformed, professing godliness and caring for the souls of others. The Christian covers what God calls nakedness, dresses from a modest and quiet spirit, and is not ashamed to look different from a world that has forgotten how to blush. God did not leave this to our guessing. He told us plainly what He means. The only question left is whether we love Him enough to do it.

Every Scripture reference in this study links to the King James Version. Open it and read for yourself.