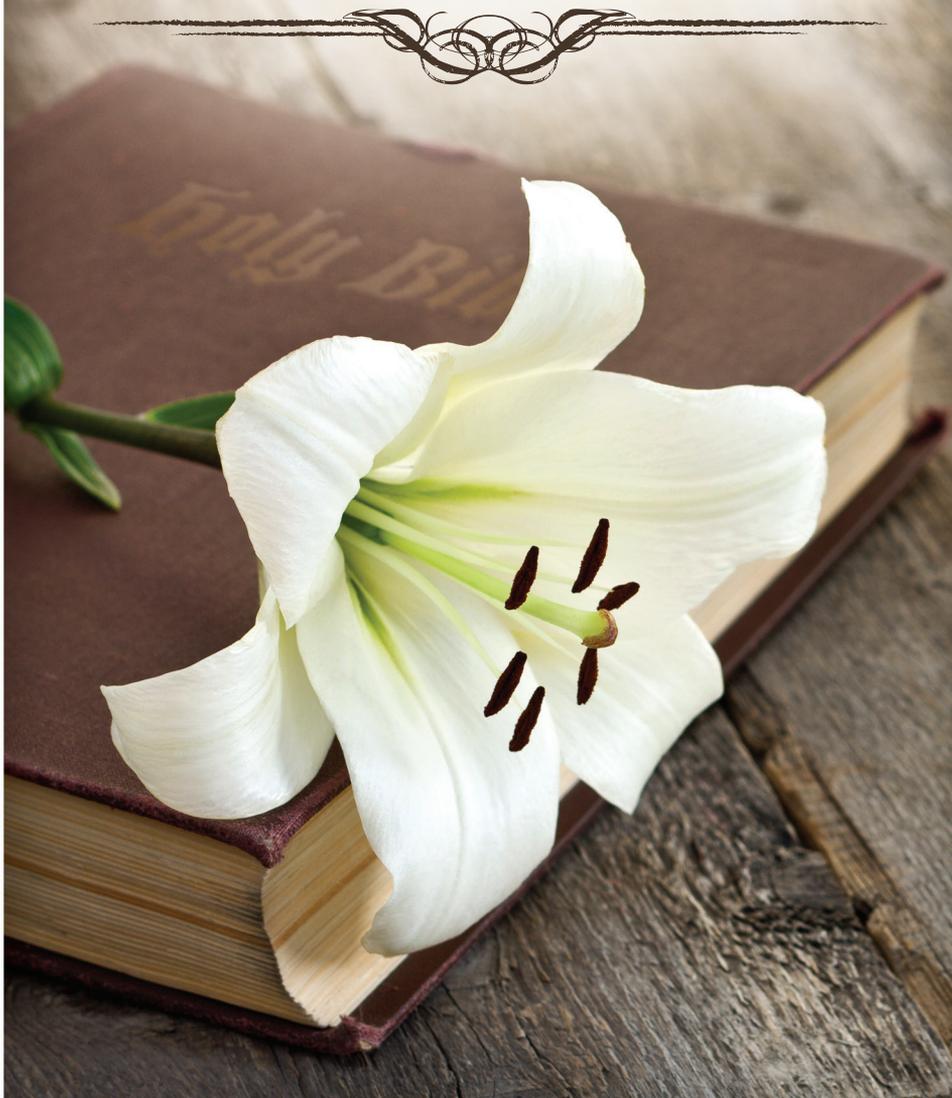


*Christian*  
**MODESTY**



*Christian*  
**MODESTY**

A decorative flourish consisting of a horizontal line with a central, symmetrical, ornate scrollwork design.

*1<sup>st</sup> Edition, April 2017*

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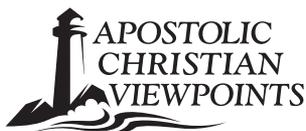
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*This booklet is part of the Apostolic Christian Viewpoints series, a collection of writings prepared by a committee of the Elder Council of the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean).*

*These booklets are not intended as exhaustive works on their respective subjects. Rather, they are offered as an encouragement to those who currently embrace these views; and to those who do not, a call to consider these topics in the light of scripture ... and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. (2 Tim 2:7).*



## I. A QUESTION OF MODESTY

An Op-Ed article in the *New York Times*, titled What Our Words Tell Us, cited a study that showed that usage of the word “modesty” had dropped by 52% over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While we cannot draw conclusions from a single report, it does prompt us to consider our nation’s unquestionable trend toward immodesty. Evidence of sweeping change in America is found everywhere: provocative fashion, profane speech, and promiscuous behavior have become the staples of popular literature, magazines, and movies. Examples of shameless immodesty are prominently displayed on billboards, in advertisements, and across the websites of major news media outlets. These powerful media are both reflecting and shaping our cultural norms. One wonders how much further matters will go. Are there no limits to the general public’s tolerance of overt depravity?

These drastic changes defy Biblical teaching. They taunt young believers who are committed to living a life of purity. They undermine the efforts of God-fearing parents who are devoted to raising their children in the ways of the Lord. They shock an older generation who have never witnessed brazenness on this scale. If we desire to be faithful followers of the Lord Jesus, this is a topic that we cannot afford to ignore. The state of our culture and the influence of mass media require that we devote special attention to the topic of modesty, especially as it relates to our appearance, our speech, and our standard of living.

## II. PROVE ALL THINGS

To help us understand this important subject, we will review the definition of modesty and survey related examples. At times, it will be helpful to examine opposites to clarify the subject we are trying to understand. It is important to recognize that the Bible usually does not provide us with a textbook definition of the Christian virtues. Often, it describes their qualities instead.<sup>1</sup> Thus, our starting point will be understanding what modesty is and what it is not. We will then appraise examples of modesty and areas of life where modesty should be exercised.

In approaching this topic, it is especially important that we understand the relationship between biblical principles and their applications. Principles that are recorded in the Holy Bible contain God's eternal truth. Knowing how to put them into practice (i.e., application) enables us to keep and uphold the teachings. When the Christian Church turns to the Scriptures, it often finds not only the principles but also the applications of those principles. Of course, not every possible application is spelled out for us. It is one of the primary roles of the Holy Spirit to show us how to apply (and keep) biblical principles in our daily life.

There are a few common mistakes related to principles and applications that we must avoid. One mistake is to emphasize a specific application *over* the principle itself. By focusing too much on what we don't do, but not enough on why we don't do it, we set ourselves up for potential contradictions. To explain: we could end up being fully prepared to register as a conscientious objector to combatant service and, yet, we may verbally attack brothers in the church with whom we disagree. By focusing exclusively on our position of not going to war—but not the underlying principle of loving our neighbors and enemies—we have violated the biblical principle. It is a different degree of violation than killing in wartime, but it is a violation nevertheless. This hypocrisy results from emphasizing one or two applications of a principle to the exclusion of understanding and embracing the underlying principle.

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Corinthians 13 as an example of how the Bible “defines” love.

The opposite mistake is to emphasize the principle but deemphasize the applications of that principle. People may shy away from being too specific on how to keep God's Word because they are afraid of being legalistic. This fear can lead to hypocrisy. For example, we might be loud and clear on our need to show love toward all, but then leave the question of fighting in war to the individual's conscience. "Love your enemies and turn the other cheek, but we will leave it up to you if you want to train to kill your enemies". This confusion comes as a result of avoiding setting expectations of keeping the principle. Being content to pay lip service to the Word of God is not actual obedience.

It is important that we understand the relationship between biblical principles and their applications. Failure to do so may cause men and women to 'strain at gnats' but 'swallow camels' on the one hand, or to have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof on the other.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 23:24, 2 Timothy 3:5

### III. DEFINING MODESTY

Having discussed the above points, a good place for us to begin is to define modesty. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, modesty is a noun that means, “Freedom from conceit or vanity”. It also means, “Propriety in dress, speech, or conduct”.<sup>3</sup> Notice that modesty is defined as *the absence* of conceit and vanity. A shared synonym for both conceit and vanity is arrogance. Consequently, if we wish to understand what modesty is we must understand what it is not. It is the opposite of arrogance, conceit, and vanity. How does one act if they are arrogant? How does one speak if they are conceited? How does one adorn themselves if they are vain?

The dictionary definition also identifies the positive characteristics of this virtue. In basic terms, modesty is the state of being proper. It is being conformed to the conventionally accepted standards of behavior or morals. Therefore, as a quality of the heart, modesty strives to be proper in all behavior, including our dress, speech and conduct. It motivates one to act with a proper sense of reserve and humility, particularly with regard to oneself.

In the New Testament, the two Greek words the Apostle Paul used to convey his teaching on this topic are *kósmios* and *aidós*.<sup>4</sup> The first of these two words is translated as modest, of good behavior. It carries the sense of that which is well arranged, seemly, and orderly. The second word is translated “shamefacedness” and carries the sense of bashfulness, reverence, regard for others, respect. It derives from the idea of having “downcast eyes”. With these definitions in mind, we will next examine Biblical examples of modesty.

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<sup>3</sup> Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix

#### IV. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF MODESTY

One of the noblest Biblical examples of modesty is found in the life of David, the hero of Israel. Whether as shepherd, giant slayer, harpist or fugitive, this man continually acted with modesty. As a shepherd boy, he stayed with the flocks in the fields, even when his family had the great honor of receiving the prophet Samuel into their home – he kept his place in the field, even for such an important occasion. Following his stunning victory over Goliath, we hear no vain words of boasting. We only hear him identify himself as “the son of thy servant, Jesse”. David was an exceptional musician. His keen mind composed some of the most beautiful literature ever written. He had the courage and strength to fight a lion with his bare hands. It is no wonder that he was the indisputable favorite of the nation. However, with all of this in his favor, David scarcely could be persuaded to marry the King’s daughter. In his years leading up to his Kingship, we find no arrogance, no vanity, and no conceit in his life. David’s modesty was not merely verbal, his heart’s commitment to being proper shone through at all times and in every occasion. Repeatedly we read “he behaved himself wisely”.

Another godly example of modesty is found in Esther, the Jewish Queen of the First Persian Empire. Although she lived in a very different culture and time period than ours, the principle of modesty transcends ways of life that may be vastly different one from another. Consider that the Scriptures emphasize that she was very beautiful. How many women have used their beauty for personal attention and advantage? Queen Jezebel, wife of King Ahab, was infamous in this regard. Many popular female celebrities today, whose lives are followed in detail by the media, are often the epitome of arrogance, vanity and conceit. In great contrast to those who flaunt their physical beauty, Esther’s behavior reflected a woman who feared the Lord. She relied on her faith in God, not her attractiveness, to obtain favor on behalf of her people. She did not flirt, she did not *use* her beauty; she was a woman of God.

In these Old Testament examples, the virtue of modesty does not stand alone; it is always accompanied by other virtues of godliness. This is also true for those who live under the New Testament. Modesty is a beautiful spiritual virtue in a Christian’s life, but it is only one of many. A believer’s inner life in Christ will produce visible, outward fruit. For this reason, Christian modesty will not be found in a vacuum: it is always accompanied by the other attributes of the Lord Jesus.

## V. CLOTHED WITH HUMILITY

The New Testament provides us with clear principles that address the topic of how we should dress ourselves. In particular, notice the teaching found in 1 Peter 5:5, “*..all of you... be clothed with humility*”. Here is clear instruction coming directly from the heart of God. He wants his children to be clothed with humility. This is hardly surprising because we know that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, he wants us to be humble, inside and out. How does one clothe themselves with humility? This figurative language is teaching us that inwardly, we must be humble. As with modesty, true humility begins in the heart. As shown in the context of this verse, evidence of being clothed with humility is when we are “subject one to another”. The practice of mutual deference between Christian Brothers and Sisters is a fruit of humility.

Another fruit of inward humility is outward modesty in our appearance. Insight to this point is given to us in chapter 3 of this same epistle. The Apostle Peter writes that Christian Sisters are to cover themselves with chastity, the fear of God, and to adorn themselves with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. In other words, their outward appearance should reflect purity, reverence and submission to God. He becomes specific in applying this truth by instructing the Sister to avoid extravagant hair styles, the ornamental use of gold and wearing of immoderate clothing.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in this epistle, we find not only a principle of modesty (being clothed with humility), but also applications of this principle (being in submission, being subject to one another, avoiding the appearance of worldliness).

The Apostle Paul was inspired in a similar manner. In his letter to Timothy,<sup>6</sup> women are exhorted to dress modestly, having a keen sense of appropriateness and thoughtfulness, adorning themselves with good works. As with the Apostle Peter, Paul also instructs to avoid showy hair styles, the wearing of gold and pearls (i.e., jewelry), and expensive clothing. The united teaching of the Apostles make it clear that Christian modesty in outward appearance is an important and

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 3:2-5

<sup>6</sup> 1 Timothy 2:9-10

necessary part of the Church maintaining a godly witness to an unsaved world.

Truly there is a crisis in modesty today. One cannot honestly deny this reality. It begins with conceit and vanity in the heart, and manifests itself in inappropriate behaviors and lifestyles. The problem with painting the eyes and nails, the wearing of jewelry, and expensive clothing is the bringing of attention to self. Worse, many popular fashions and styles are designed for the express purpose of attracting sexualized attention to the body. This happens either through failing to adequately cover or by using extremely form-fitting clothes. In so many ways, the eyes of men are teased, inciting lustful thinking and voyeurism. It is as if there is a concerted effort to undermine Jesus' teaching of practicing purity with our eyes.<sup>7</sup>

The enormous problems caused by immodesty are not limited to the obvious temptations it creates. The prevalence of immodesty effectively distorts one's perception of what is acceptable and what is "crossing the line". Children grow up today believing that partial undress and indecent clothes are normal and okay. This glorification of the flesh leads one away from the dignity and beauty that God assigned each gender. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the pursuit of such absolute freedom results in "civilized" societies that are wallowing in the filth of pornography, wrestling with the confusion of androgyny<sup>8</sup>, and embracing the disturbing practices of tattoos, body piercings, and self-mutilation. All of this is overt rebellion against God and his creative purposes.

The devout man and woman of God, regardless of age, marital status, or ethnicity, recognizes this sobering reality and strives to honor Christ by dressing modestly and appropriately for every occasion. How should we uphold the Apostles teaching on modesty? How can we be sure that we are not simply following culture (whether today's or yesterday's)? What should we teach our children and youth about their outward appearance? In view of these questions, consider the following:

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:28

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix

- The Christian understands his or her body belongs to the Lord, it is his temple. Therefore, we are called to use our bodies to glorify God, not to glorify our flesh (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
- One of the primary purposes of clothing is to cover our bodies, not to expose them.
- The pure in heart will not dress in a way that attracts the impure attention of others.
- Being proper in our outward appearance means respecting the God-ordained differences between male and female by dressing and acting either masculine or feminine.
- Modesty is rooted in the heart; therefore, it strives to be dressed appropriately at all times and places, not just on selected occasions.
- Avoid conformity to the world and using its norms as your point of reference to decide what is modest. Instead, allow the Word of God to transform your thinking so that you can discern his perfect will, even for your appearance. Doing this will help you to present your body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Romans 12:1-2).

Today, true Christian modesty in our outward appearance is quickly becoming a radical testimony to a world that is drowning in lust and perversion.

## VI. THY SPEECH BETRAYETH THEE

It has been observed that the more invisible one becomes, the more visible Christ becomes in them. This is true not only of our appearance, but equally true of our speech. How did Jesus speak? The Gospel tells us that the people marveled at how graciously he spoke. What a contrast to the language of a modern political campaign. The boasting, self-promotion, exaggeration, criticism, and personal attacks make it a model of the exact opposite of truly Christian speech.

Modesty in our speech is absolutely crucial to our personal testimony. This is true because our words reveal our heart. The Lord Jesus explained it this way, “*out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh*”. He also added that with our words we bring forth and share with others the treasures of our hearts, whether they are good or evil.<sup>9</sup> Immodest speech is not simply a lack of decorum or good manners; it can actually be a sin. The sins of the tongue are sometimes overlooked because it is difficult to measure their cumulative effect on others. Sometimes the effect is not immediate or obvious. Nevertheless, the sins of boasting, gossip and slander are not small matters. When such grievous speech is made by those claiming to be Christians, it is especially serious.

The Apostle James warns of those who offend everyone with their speech. He writes that they shall receive great condemnation (literally: damnation). James points out that the source of such bitterness and strife is a heart that he describes as being filled with sensual, devilish wisdom. It is no wonder that the Lord Jesus said that by our words we shall be justified or condemned. In great contrast to such offensive, immodest speech, James also writes of the mature man or woman of God who bridle their tongues so that they do not offend others. The speech that comes from a heart filled with the Spirit is pure, peaceable, gentle, easily entreated, filled with mercy and other fruits of the Spirit. Thankfully, the Scriptures are filled with many instructions regarding our speech. Consider the following:

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 12:34-35

- We should speak slowly  
(Proverbs 18:13, 29:20; James 1:19)
- We should speak sparingly  
(Proverbs 10:19, 17:27, Ecclesiastes 5:2-3)
- We should speak truthfully  
(Matthew 5:37; Ephesians 4:15, 4:25)
- We should speak graciously  
(Proverbs 10:32; Colossians 4:6; Titus 2:8)

The power to help or hurt others with our words can hardly be overestimated. In some instances, the effect can last for years, whether for good or ill. In our day, it is especially important to point out that these biblical principles regarding our speech apply to *all* of our words, whether they are spoken aloud or written on paper, typed in an e-mail, texted, or posted online. We may forget that the same expectations apply while interacting on the Internet or through the latest technology. Indeed, the life of Christ within must express the life of Christ in all our communications.

## VII. LIVING WITH STANDARDS OF MODESTY

When the Adversary took our Savior to the summit of “an exceeding high mountain”, it enabled him to see all the kingdoms of the world. Their glory and splendor must have been impressive to behold. Today, we live in an era of unprecedented materialism. Through technology, we too are able to view the many glories of this world, “in a moment of time”, as it were. The lure of materialism is as strong as ever. In fact, today it is widely believed that the temptations brought by affluence and prosperity have been more effective in weakening the Church than the rigors of persecution and hardship.

The Lord Jesus wisely refused the glories that were offered him by Satan. Similarly, his followers today must avoid the snare of riches. The Lord expressly taught that we cannot serve both God and mammon (earthly wealth and riches).<sup>10</sup> We should not overlook the clear implication man will end up serving either one or the other. Here again, it is important that we consider not only the biblical principle, but also its applications.

Remember how the Lord Jesus told the rich young man to sell all his possessions and follow him? By doing this, the Lord exposed to him what his true treasures were. Similarly, we are called to view all of our possessions as being at his disposal. This ranges from the more obvious (money, houses, cars, investments) to the less obvious: the food in our refrigerator, the clothes in our closet, our laptops, and personal devices. How we respond to this calling will also expose what treasure we hold in our hearts. Do we truly believe that all of our money and possessions actually belong to him, or do we feel that somehow our money and possessions are not part of our spiritual life and service? The true disciple desires to use all his wealth and possessions, “his mammon”, in a way to give God glory and further his Kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

Our personal testimony of the Gospel may be undermined by the emphasis we place on purchasing and acquiring. If we preach about the coming day of judgment, when the world and everything in it will burn, and that our true goal is not found in this life but in eternity, and

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 6:24

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 6:19-21

yet those who hear us say these things also see us living lavish lifestyles, driving luxury autos, wearing exclusive watches, and spending excessively on the latest technology devices in lockstep with society, will they have any reason to believe our message? Such immodesty in our standard of living sows confusion. While the pattern of materialism goes hand in glove with the consumer-oriented societies in which we live, it is foreign to the Kingdom of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

Conversely, our personal testimony of the Gospel will be amplified by how we use our money. The disciples, who heard the Lord say we should take no thought for our life or our body, understood that he was teaching we should not allow our physical needs to dominate us, they are not the most important things. By remembering this exhortation, we are freed from focusing on our standard of living because our lives are instead focused on a person, not a standard. Those who keep looking unto Jesus understand that abundance in life is not measured by bank account balances or real estate holdings. The abundant life in Christ is expressed in simplicity and sharing. We are called to be rivers, not reservoirs. As we consider what Christian modesty means for the type of life we pursue, consider the following implications of Scripture<sup>13</sup>:

- Learning to help others is Christ like: he made himself poor in order to make us rich.
- It is great spiritual gain if we learn to be content with a simpler lifestyle.
- Providing for the needs of our family and loved ones is integral to faith in Christ.
- We cannot serve God and mammon (earthly wealth) but we can use mammon to serve God.
- Wise use of our finances includes being responsible.

Christian modesty, as it touches our standard of living, exposes our true center and purpose. Is it fulfillment of self or serving the Lord?

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Timothy 6:6-11, 17-19

<sup>13</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:9; 1 Timothy 6:6, 5:8; Luke 16:9-13

## VIII. QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

### *1. Isn't modesty relative to the culture we live in?*

It is commonly believed that our personal views on topics such as modesty are shaped by our surroundings and upbringing. Therefore, many believe we need to understand the differences in our views of modesty as simply being cultural or even generational. This notion is, in part, true; however, overall it misses the main point. Culture is the way of life, including beliefs and customs, of a particular people living at a particular time. It is a pattern of values, attitudes, and behaviors that are characteristic of countries and ethnic groups. What is normal and generally acceptable in one culture may be quite different from the norms of another. On the other hand, Christian modesty is the expression, the outworking, of a meek and lowly heart. Having such a heart was one of the core objectives of the Lord Jesus in his Gospel<sup>14</sup>. Thus, it can be said that modesty grows out of having Christ in our heart. Its roots reach beyond time and culture. Christian modesty is integral to the Christian's witness, and in every time and place will express itself with proper behavior, speech, and outward appearance.

### *2. Why is this topic usually directed at women?*

It is true that the topic of modesty, especially as it relates to our outward appearance, is often emphasized to women. We notice this in the Holy Scriptures as the Holy Spirit seems to especially focus on the outward appearance of women more than of men. Ironically, this focus is also found in society, though for opposite reasons. The natural outward beauty of women is regularly used to attract, to sell, and even to entertain. None of this means that the issues of modesty only belong to Christian Sisters. To the contrary, modesty is an aspect of Christian life that all believers need to firmly grasp and understand: men and women, young and old, married and single. Nevertheless, Christian women have an especially important opportunity to set a good example of godliness and Christ likeness, by dressing, behaving, and speaking modestly.

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 11:29

### ***3. Aren't standards of expectation legalistic, often leading to hypocrisy?***

Standards of expectation are not inherently legalistic. For example, the Bible clearly states that we are saved by grace and not by what we do. This does not mean we are free from standards of expectation. To the contrary, the Bible repeatedly sets expectations for our behavior and lifestyle. One could say that turning the other cheek, showing mercy instead of demanding justice, not taking a brother to court, seeking to restore broken relationships, and so on, are all standards of expectation established by Scriptures and, hence, cannot be legalistic. The danger is when we try to keep standards set by Scriptures *without* having a heart submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ. In that case, we are trying to change behavior without solving the root issue. That solution will inevitably result in a legalistic, hypocritical life. In contrast, if our lives are fully surrendered to the Lord Jesus and we seek him with all our heart, then our faith will be revealed through our actions. At that point, the standards of expectation we live out will not be legalistic nor lead to hypocrisy, they will be the response of a heart fully committed to our Lord Jesus, which is EXACTLY what our Lord desires and expects.

### ***4. How can I know if I am being modest? I want to follow the Lord, not someone's opinion.***

The crisis of modesty today is connected to a lack of satisfaction and contentment with the Lord's provision for us. Each of us must deal with the issue of modesty internally and, if we honestly examine ourselves, we will find areas of life where we do not see ourselves as being "complete in Him", as stated in Colossians 2:10. For some, it will show in their lifestyle, for others, in their behavior or speech and, for others, in their appearance. In each case, the person who seeks an honest assessment of their life from the Lord will do so by searching the Scriptures and seeking him in prayer. Those who are willing to accept the clear directions found in the Word will find contentment that will reveal itself in a modest lifestyle. Considering wise counsel from local ministers, elders, and/or godly believers will help keep us closely aligned with God's Word, not someone's opinion.

## **IX. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

The love of God and the love of the world cannot dwell together in the same heart. Ultimately, our lives are like a snapshot, depicting a relationship either with the world or with the Lord. True Christian modesty issues from a heart that loves the Lord, is content in Christ, and has a proper perspective of who we are in God's sight. As we embrace the life of Christ as a core conviction, then our motivation to live a modest life will flow freely and willingly. It will be reflected in our outward appearance, in our behavior and speech, and in the standard of living we pursue. There will be no conceit, no vanity, and no arrogance in the life of one who has meekness and lowliness of heart.



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## **X. APPENDIX**

### **Κοσμιω (kósmios) Strong's #2887**

This word is used twice in the New Testament. In 1st Timothy 2:9 it is translated as “modest”. It is also used in 1st Timothy 3:2 and translated as “of good behavior”. This word is defined by Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words as meaning “orderly, well-arranged, decent, and modest”. It is defined by Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament as meaning “well-arranged, seemly, and modest”.

### **αἰδώς (aidós) Strong's #127**

This word is also used twice in the New Testament. In 1st Timothy 2:9 it is translated as “shamefacedness”. It is also used in Hebrews 12:28 and translated as “reverence”. This word is defined by Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words as meaning “a sense of shame, modesty”. It is defined by Thayer Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament as meaning “a sense of shame, modesty”.

### **Androgynous**

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary:

- 1) having the characteristics or nature of both male and female
- 2) neither specifically feminine nor masculine, suitable to or for either sex
- 3) having traditional male and female roles obscured or reversed