

Exodus 28:42-43

I. The “Will of God” and Clothes

Over the last couple of weeks, we’ve laid the foundations for a *biblical* “theology of revelation.” What I’m praying we’ve begun to see through this study of a “theology of revelation” is the actual *miracle* of the full sufficiency of Scripture – revealing to us all that we need to know for life and godliness.

On the one hand, knowing God’s will is simple, because all of His will that we need to know has been written down and recorded for us in the completed canon of the Scriptures. On the other hand, truly knowing God’s will is also exceedingly difficult; not because of any lack of revelation or any vagueness or obscurity in God’s revelation, but rather because of our own sinful flesh which blinds us to the clear revelation of God’s will. It’s because of the blinding effects of our sinful nature that Paul can speak in Romans of our need to “discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom. 12:1-2) It’s because of the hardening effects of the “flesh” that Paul is compelled to pray so earnestly that we might be “filled with the knowledge of [God’s] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” (Col. 1:9-10)

Now, that’s putting things negatively, but we could also put it positively. Because we are all a new creation in Christ, because we’ve been changed and born again, it is our **joy** to even be **able** to discern what is the will of God, with all spiritual wisdom and understanding. So we read in Ephesians chapter five:

- Ephesians 5:8–10 — You were once darkness, but now — light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth), carefully working to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

What a stark contrast this is with much of our Christianity today. The will of God is not something that we take delight in carefully working to discern as a worthy and satisfying end in itself. It’s just not. How truly can each one of us say that it’s our chief delight to be engaged in the task of carefully working to discern at all times and in every aspect of our lives what is pleasing to the Lord? To the extent that this is not true of us, we can almost be guaranteed that we are *not* walking pleasing to the Lord.

We saw last week that instead of “carefully working to discern,” what we often do is reduce the will of God to certain “proof texts” that we can fairly easily and mechanically obey as the “**good Christians**” that we are. In other words, instead of delighting in the will of God as a **full-time** calling and lifestyle, what we actually delight in is living our lives how we want – **in so far as the will of God will let us**. There’s a radical, night and day difference between these two ways of living and thinking. I think it’s important to say this again: Instead of delighting in the will of God as a **full-time** calling and lifestyle, what we actually delight in is living our lives how we want to **so far as the will of God will let us**. Instead of the will of God being the air that we breathe and the very world that we move in, we see the will of God more as the **boundaries** out on the periphery, where, so long as I don’t go beyond them, I’m “good.” Which is your approach to the will of God? Do you find yourself depending more on “proof texts” or on the principles

and the theology of Scripture? Do you find yourself depending more on your own human wisdom and reasoning or do you find yourself earnestly and prayerfully asking God for spiritual wisdom and understanding? (cf. James 1:5-8)

What about in the area of clothes? Is this one of the areas in which you are diligently delighting in the careful work of discerning what is pleasing to the Lord? Is this one of the areas in which you are earnestly asking God for a spiritual wisdom and understanding? Are the contents of your closet based more on “proof texts” or on the principles and the theology of Scripture? Do you see God’s will concerning clothes as something all-encompassing, or do you see His will concerning clothes more as a boundary out on the periphery, where, so long as I don’t go beyond that, I’m “good”? Are you delighting in the will of God concerning clothes as that which is beautiful and lovely – as that which opens up a door for expressing glad submission to God, who has redeemed you, and called you, and made you His very own?

There’s a very real sense in which that’s where I want to stop. There’s a very real sense in which I know that’s all that needs to be said. I am convinced that if we **truly** took these simple questions **to heart**, our wardrobes would pretty much take care of themselves. I can’t do the work of the Holy Spirit in us, and may God keep me from any pretense of trying. I need the Holy Spirit’s work in me. Nevertheless, maybe the one thing I *can* try to help us see a little more clearly is a biblical theology of clothes. Please, ask yourself this question: “Am I approaching this topic with resistance and with my guard up? Or, am I approaching this topic with eagerness, desiring above all else to be equipped to know and to discern the will of the Lord?”

II. A Theology of Clothes

- **Exodus 28:42–43 (cf. 20:26) — You shall make for [the priests] linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh.** They shall reach from the hips to the thighs; and they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or **when they come near the altar** to minister in the Holy Place, lest they bear guilt and die. This shall be a statute forever for him and for his offspring after him.

So, underneath the robe and the tunic, the priests were to wear a linen undergarment to cover their (already pretty thoroughly covered) naked flesh. This linen undergarment was to reach from the hips to the thighs and was to be on the priests whenever they went into the tent of meeting or came near the altar of incense to minister in the Holy Place, lest they bear guilt and die.

The point, here, is not to provide us all with specific rules and guidelines (measurements) for the clothes we wear today. We must avoid this dangerous pitfall like the plague.

But there’s another pitfall we need to be equally zealous to avoid – concluding that because this isn’t your common, everyday “proof text,” therefore, it doesn’t really have any implications for what’s in my closet. In fact, when we see the theology of these verses, we’ll see that they have *everything* to do with what’s in our closets today. The theology of these verses actually provides us with the very *foundation*—the very heart and soul—of a biblical theology of clothes.

The point of these linen undergarments is the covering of the priest's nakedness specifically **when they are in the presence of God**. In other words, these undergarments are to be a guarantee of priestly "modesty" before the Lord. We don't often think of the need for modesty lest the Lord should "see" our nakedness, but for the priests in the days of the tabernacle and the temple, this was a very, *very* big deal. God warned them that modesty in His presence was required lest they bear guilt and die! The question is, *why* should this be? God sees right into our hearts; how much more, then, through our clothes! So if the point isn't that God blushes when He sees us, then what is it? The point here, in the context of worship in God's tent, is our shame and unworthiness in His holy presence.

In the Bible, nakedness is actually a **synonym** for "*shame*."

- Revelation 3:18 — I counsel you to buy from me... white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the **shame** of your **nakedness** may not be seen.
- Revelation 16:15 — Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about **naked** and be seen **exposed**!
- Isaiah 47:1-3 — Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans! For you shall no more be called tender and delicate. Take the millstones and grind flour, put off your veil, strip off your robe, uncover your legs, pass through the rivers. Your **nakedness** shall be uncovered, and your **disgrace** shall be seen.
- Micah 1:11 — Pass on your way, inhabitants of Shaphir, in **nakedness** and **shame**.
- Nahum 3:5 — Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will make nations look at your **nakedness** and kingdoms at your **shame**.

Now, what we have to realize here is that the point isn't simply our being "embarrassed." The shame of our nakedness goes all the way back to the beginning, and the garden – where we see that this shame is ultimately connected with our sinfulness and guilt. In Genesis, we read that before the fall of Adam and Eve into sin "the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." (Gen. 2:25) But after they sinned, "the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves [coverings]." (Gen. 3:7) But even with these ["coverings"], Adam and Eve still felt the shame of their nakedness.

- Genesis 3:8-10 — They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife **hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God** among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and **I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.**"

Notice that whether or not Adam and Eve felt any shame in each other's presence, the only emphasis in Genesis is that they felt the shame of their nakedness in the presence of the **Lord**. The shame of their nakedness was now all bound up together with their sin and their guilt—and (*this is important*) their sin and their guilt *not* before each other, but before **God**. And so we're prepared to see, now, the awesome beauty of this simple verse:

- Genesis 3:21 — And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

In the blood of animals being shed so that the shame/nakedness of Adam and Eve might be covered, we have a foreshadowing of the blood of Christ being shed so that our own shame and guilt might be taken away. Whatever the “coverings” were that Adam and Eve made for themselves (they were probably quite substantial as far as they went), Adam and Eve clearly still felt “naked.” They hid themselves *from God* even *in* their “coverings,” “*because*,” the man said, “I was naked.” And so God Himself clothed Adam and Eve more thoroughly in order that their “shame” might be covered – in order that they might understand His desire that they should once again (one day) enter His presence without shame, and without guilt, and without fear. In light of all this, we can read Exodus 28 again and see not only the holiness of God, but also His great mercy and love.

- Exodus 28:42–43 (cf. 20:26) — **You shall make for [the priests] linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh.** They shall reach from the hips to the thighs; and they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or **when they come near the altar** to minister in the Holy Place, **lest** they bear guilt and die.

What is the purpose of clothes? It is to **cover** and **hide** our shame (cf. Deut. 22:12), and ultimately to be a very vivid picture of God’s redeeming mercy and grace. And so in Revelation we read:

- Revelation 19:7–8 (cf. Rev. 3:5; 4:4; 7:9, 13-14) — Let us rejoice and exult and give [God] the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Here is the foundation for a biblical theology of clothes. What is the purpose of clothes? It is to cover and hide our shame, and ultimately to be a picture of God’s redeeming mercy and grace.

III. Praying for Spiritual Wisdom to *live out* a Biblical Theology of Clothes

Now, the question is, are we truly discerning this theology of clothes (this “will of God”) with a spiritual wisdom and understanding? And if so, what does this mean, and what does it look like? Are you *purposefully delighting* and *loving to actively live out this* theology of clothes with *thankfulness* to God? Is this theology the primary, motivating factor in all that you buy, in all that you have in your closet, in all that you wear? Once again, I’m convinced that if we **truly** took these simple questions **to heart**, while earnestly asking God for a spiritual wisdom and understanding, our wardrobes would pretty much take care of themselves. But our flesh blinds us and deceives us all.

First of all, the world works to turn nakedness from that which is our “shame” to that which is “empowering,” or “sexy,” or might I say, “cute.” (“Cute” has become our more “innocent” substitute for “sexy.”) And so, as a result, the **primary** purpose of much of our clothes, today, is no longer to **cover** and to **hide**, but to accentuate, to draw attention to, and even to reveal. The

other day, Andrea and I were going through clothes for our girls. We could only conclude that almost all girls' clothes today is opposed to a biblical theology of clothes, and therefore opposed to God's redeeming love and grace. The shorts are as short as they can be to reveal as much skin and thigh as possible. The jeans are decorated in such a way as to say that the butt is "sexy" (or "cute"). Some jeans even have large, strategically placed holes on the upper thighs. (To cover or to reveal?) The "yoga" pants fit like a second layer of skin. The hem lines are so short that if you bend over, you feel the need to smooth things down in the back, or if you're sitting down it becomes absolutely essential to keep your legs either crossed or as tightly together as possible, and your hands always on your lap always trying to get an extra inch out of the length. The shirts or tops are *very often* strategically designed in some way either to highlight, accentuate, or reveal.

There may be things that we all consider to be "immodest." The question we need to be asking ourselves is "why?" On what biblical-theological basis do I consider this or that to be immodest? Today, instead of asking ourselves, "How can I love making my closet a reflection of God's will and of His redeeming grace to sinners," our first and primary question is often this: "**How** cute, and stylish, and trendy can I be without being immodest?" Once again, "modesty" becomes the boundary on the periphery, where, so long as I don't go beyond that, I'm "good." But if this is the way we're thinking, then we're almost certainly *not* dressing modestly. If this is the way we're thinking, then we can know that we have not yet attained to a spiritual wisdom and understanding.

As an important side note, I want to mention that the point is not that our bodies are not good in every respect as a creation of God. The point is only the **theological meaning** of our nakedness outside the context of the marriage bed. (cf. Song of Solomon) This explains why it's **fully in keeping with the Gospel** that when a primitive people group is reached for Christ, they should naturally be taught to wear clothes (the point isn't simply embarrassment, or lust, or immorality). This also helps us to see that even if you were the only person on a deserted island in a temperate climate, it would still be appropriate to wear clothes – to be covered in some way.

Now, you'll notice that all the clothes I just mentioned were girls' clothes. If boys/men we're wearing short-shorts or skin tight shorts or pants, I'd mention this, too. There have been, and still are men's styles (for example, in swimwear) that I would "call out" *not* because women might find them objectionable, but rather because it's opposed to a biblical theology of nakedness and shame – because it has everything to do with a man in his relationship with God. *In the same way*, the point of women's modesty is *not* primarily about men, but rather about a biblical theology of nakedness, and shame, and the **redeeming grace** that God revealed when **He gave us** clothes. The point of a woman's modesty is *not* primarily about men; rather, it has everything to do with the reality of *who* she is as a redeemed sinner, and *who* God is – both in His holiness *and* in His mercy and grace.

It's very important to notice that in the two places where the Bible speaks most specifically of a woman's dress, this "dress" is never said to have anything to do with the danger of causing a man to stumble; instead, it has everything to do with the woman's own true godliness and ultimate salvation.

- 1 Timothy 2:8–15 — I desire then that... women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

See how modesty is placed in the context of godliness and salvation, without there being any mention of the potential stumbling block to a man.

- 1 Peter 3:3–6 — Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

Once again, dress is linked with **humility** and the active, purposeful pursuit of godliness – quite apart from any danger of being a stumbling block to a brother who is seeking to be pure in mind and heart. As one commentator says, “Dress must be *expressive* of an *inner* modesty, and the *outlook* of a Christian.” (Hendriksen; emphasis mine)

As a side note, notice also that in both of these verses, modesty is linked with a godly submission. It shouldn’t surprise us, then, to see that the dress of girls and women today has everything to do with a feminist agenda of “empowerment” (“girl power”) and “independence,” and self-promotion. As Christians, we may not want to adopt the “philosophy” itself, but we have and are adopting both the means of promoting and also the expression of that ungodly philosophy in our dress. This can be true even in our dress that we would not normally think of as “immodest.” Consider the clothes that are expensive (name brand), faddish, and generally designed to attract attention.

One thing I’ll always tell my daughters: “*If there were no boys anywhere in the world* (seriously!), those jeans, or those shorts, or those “whatever,” would still not be the will of God for you because they’re not in keeping with a biblical theology of clothes – because they’re not in keeping with who you are as a redeemed sinner and who God is, both in His holiness and in His grace and mercy and love for you.

Having said this, I must also say that I have often found that church is not a place where I feel that my sons will be “safe.” Why is this? I believe it’s because we see modesty as the boundary rather than our love and delight. I believe it’s because we see modesty as a proof text rather than a theology. I believe it’s because we see modesty as a rule rather than a thankful and joyful living out of the Gospel. I believe it’s because we’re asking ourselves: “How cute can I be without being immodest?” instead of earnestly asking God *in faith* for spiritual wisdom and

understanding. It's because daughters are disobedient to their parents, and because fathers are either "hands off" on this topic, or they can only approach the topic in a legalistic way.

So let me ask this question of *both* women *and* men, girls *and* boys equally: Is modesty your *love* and *delight*? Do your clothes truly reflect a biblical theology of nakedness and shame? Is your closet *first of all* and primarily a *glad, conscious, purposeful, humble* expression of your *thankfulness* to God for His *redeeming grace*? As you can see, this isn't a topic that can be solved with rules, even if there were any explicit rules. It's a topic that can only be solved with the wisdom that the indwelling Holy Spirit gives to those who truly ask **in faith**.

Now, there is more that could be said in relation to a biblical theology of clothes, but most of it has much less relevance for the topic of modesty. Nevertheless, there's still one main point to consider. There is no disputing the fact that of male and female, God has created the male to be the "stronger" sex for the reflection of His glory, and the female to be the delicate and fairer sex, also for the reflection of His glory. (1 Pet. 3:7) I remember once when I was little asking my mom why girls ever got married because I didn't see anything attractive in boys. As the "fairer" sex it makes sense that the Bible speaks only of the external "adorning" of women (cf. 1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3) and not the external "adorning" of men. There is nothing wrong with a woman adorning herself with beautiful clothes or with jewelry. This is entirely in keeping with being a woman. And yet, notice that even the adornment of these beautiful and costly clothes is still intended first of all to **cover** and **hide** the shame of nakedness.

➤ Ezekiel 16:8, 10–14 (cf. Isa. 52:1; 2 Sam. 1:24) — "When I passed by you again and saw you... I spread the corner of my garment over you and **covered your nakedness**; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine... I **clothed you** also with *embroidered cloth* and shod you with *fine leather*. I **wrapped you** in *fine linen* and **covered you** with *silk*. And I **adorned you** with *ornaments* and put *bracelets* on your wrists and a *chain* on your neck. And I put a *ring* on your nose and *earrings* in your ears and a beautiful *crown* on your head. Thus you were **adorned** with *gold* and *silver*, and your clothing was of *fine linen* and *silk* and *embroidered cloth*... You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord GOD.

Notice that these "beautiful" clothes are not a different cut or a different "style"; they're simply higher quality and more beautifully colored. Notice, also, that these clothes should not be an incentive for pride or self-promotion, because they were given and provided by God in His mercy and grace. It's not wrong to be beautiful and on appropriate times and occasions to be adorned with beautiful clothes, and jewelry, and hair, etc. It's also not wrong, *if* at all possible, to be "well-dressed" according to the times so that you don't stick out in a "bad" way. ("Be not the first by whom the new is tried, nor yet the last to lay the old aside." – Pope; quoted in Hendriksen, 1 Timothy) And yet, a true biblical theology of clothes will help us see that God knows nothing of clothes as a means for the **pursuit** of being "cool," "trendy," "cute," and, ultimately, **self-promoting**. (In today's idolization of "cuteness" and external adorning, we now also have "selfies" and social media further enabling us to "innocently" promote and draw attention to "me.")

- 1 Peter 3:3–4 (cf. 1 Tim. 2:9-10) — Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, just like we need a theology of revelation, so also, we need a theology of clothes. Indeed, as Christians, we need a **theology of everything**.

What is the purpose of clothes? It is to cover and hide our shame, and ultimately to be a picture of God’s redeeming mercy and grace. Now, the question is, are we truly discerning this theology of clothes (this “will of God”) with a spiritual wisdom and understanding? I believe with all my heart that if we will read and study God’s Word not as a collection of proof-texts, but as the revelation of the way of wisdom, and then if we will earnestly ask God in faith for spiritual wisdom and understanding – He will give it to us “generously and without reproach.” (James 1:5)

Can we truly say that instead of living our lives how we want **in so far as the will of God will let us**, our **chief delight** is in the will of God as a wonderful end in itself – as, literally, a **full-time** calling and lifestyle? Can we truly say that instead of seeing the will of God more as the boundaries out on the periphery, where, so long as I don’t go beyond them, I’m “good,” we see the will of God as being the very air that we breathe and the very world in which we move?

Which is *your* approach to the will of God? Specifically, do you see modesty simply as a boundary and a rule, or as your very love and delight? Do your clothes truly reflect a biblical theology of nakedness and shame? Are you asking: “How cute can I be without being immodest?” or is the one thing you’re asking with more zeal than anything else: “Father, please give me spiritual wisdom and understanding that I might live in every way wholly pleasing to You.”

Last question: Is your closet first of all and primarily a glad, conscious, purposeful, humble expression of your thankfulness to God for His **redeeming grace**?