

Men, Women, Modesty and Culture.

(What is Modesty?)

Question 1—*Why should we be concerned to gain a knowledge of modesty before we examine the practice of modesty?*

Answer—Solomon teaches that wisdom, grasping the nature of reality, is before instruction, or discipline, which is moral instruction; when these are set in proper order, it leads to the perception, or discernment, which produces understanding, Prov. 1:2. In other words, knowledge must precede ethics, Prov. 4:5-7. If there is knowledge, or wisdom, then ethics, or moral instruction, is meaningful, but without knowledge the ethics are without value, Prov. 19:2. You may have “good” intentions, but your deeds will remain immoral, *cf.* Prov. 21:4. Wisdom grasps the nature of reality because it consists of a knowledge of the way in which to walk, as the command of the LORD, Lev. 19:2. Instruction, or moral discipline, consists in that teaching which leads to ethical amendment, Prov. 6:23. Once moral, or ethical, instruction accurately reflects knowledge, possessed as wisdom, then it transmits and reinforces that knowledge becoming itself experimental knowledge, Prov. 15:33.

Question 2—*How should we understand various Scripture passages which we shall examine?*

Answer—There are several things which must be kept in mind, as rules for the right understanding of the Scripture passages: 1.) All Scripture, whether precept, good and necessary consequences or approved examples, are set before us for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness, whereby men are furnished to all good works, 2 Tim. 3:16, 17. 2.) The instruction found in this Scripture is perfect and binds every one to a full conformity so that the least disconformity is sin, Ps. 19:7; Jas. 2:10. 3.) This instruction is spiritual and reaches to every power of the soul, understanding, will and affections, as well as words, works and gestures, Rom. 7:14; Deut. 6:5. 4.) This instruction may teach the same things, in several ways, sometimes through requirements, other times through prohibitions, Col. 3:5; Amos 8:5. 5.) Whatever this instruction commands, the contrary sin is forbidden, Matt. 15:4-6; whatever this law forbids, the contrary duty is commanded, Eph. 4:28. 6.) Whatever, therefore, is forbidden is never to be done, Job 13:7, 8; whatever is commanded is always to be done, Deut. 4:8, 9. 7.) Whatever this instruction commends as duty or condemns as sin it does in all kinds and with all causes, means, occasions, appearances or provocations thereto, Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28. 8.) Whatever this instruction forbids or commands in ourselves, we are bound, according to our places and stations, to see avoided or performed by others, Ex. 20:10; Josh. 24:15; Deut. 6:6, 7. 9.) Whatever this instruction commands to others, we are bound, according to our places and stations, to be helpful to them, 2 Cor. 1:24; whereas we must take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden, Eph. 5:11.

Question 3—*What is modesty?*

Answer—In the Old Testament, the first Hebrew word to describe modesty, *tzana* (צַנָּה), speaks of the reserved or retiring quality, being discreet, which constitutes modesty is related to the word, *tzoneh* (צֹנֶה), for sheep, Num. 32:24; Ps. 8:7; thus, as Christians, we may understand that this word speaks of our relation to Christ, the good shepherd, and refers to our Christianly deportment, John 10:2-5; Matt. 10:16. Modesty encompasses several things: 1.) It embraces a self-effacing lowliness, or humility, that abandons pride and submits to the wisdom of walking as God has commanded, Prov. 11:2 (צַנּוּתִים). It connotes that inner, or private, frame of heart and mind required to walk in the commandments of the LORD, Mic. 6:8. Here, the form of the verb is Hiphil, *hatzanayah* (הִצַּנְיָה), which denotes making oneself humble, or modest, in order to walk.

The second Hebrew word, *shaphal* (שַׁפַּל), forms the root of the word used to describe the lowlands, or vale (*shephalah*; שַׁפְּלָה), which join mounts of Judah to the plains of the Philistines, Deut. 1:7. This word

demonstrates some other aspects of modesty: 3.) It upholds, supports or retains, rather than dissipates, that honor which pertains to the person, Prov. 29:23 (4 .)תִּיִרְאֵה לְפָנָיו.) It is that disposition necessary to receive the grace of God, Ps. 138:6 (לְפָנָיו).

In the New Testament, the Greek word for modesty, *kosmios* (κόσμιος), connotes the well-ordered, moderate disposition which is both appropriate and observes decorum, 1 Tim. 2:9 (κοσμίῳ). This word is derived from the word *kosmos* (κόσμος), which speaks of the world as an orderly arrangement, Rom. 1:20 (κόσμου). From this, it came to be used to describe that external adorning to be found in garments, or adorning apparel, 1 Pet. 3:3 (ἱματίων κόσμος).

Modesty, then, emphasizes an inner dimension of striving, consisting in a moral quality, which is reflected in our relationships with God and amongst men, 1 Pet. 5:5, 6. Moreover, modesty makes itself known through many ways, our deportment, our conversation and our clothing, Rom. 6:12, 13.

Question 4—*Does modesty apply to both men and women?*

Answer—Yes. Because modesty is grounded in humility of spirit, it must apply to both men and women for all are called to exercise themselves in this manner before God, if they would have and retain communion with the LORD, Isa. 57:15. For men, because of their more public character, modesty is reflected in good, or appropriate, behavior which is aimed at securing approval by example, 1 Tim. 3:2 (κόσμιον). For women, being designed the more demure and private sex, Tit. 2:5; modesty particularly respects their outward appearance and conduct before men, 1 Tim. 2:9 (modest clothing with a sense of moral self-respect and prudence; καταστολῆ κοσμίῳ μετὰ αἰδοῦς καὶ σωφροσύνης).

Question 5—*What does modesty have to do with the distinction of the sexes?*

Answer—Just as modesty should control the conduct of all men, male or female, before God, Matt. 5:3; so, too, it should exercise its presence with respect to the relation and distinction between the sexes, 1 Cor. 11:8, 9. Modesty manifests itself differently due to the different foci of their respective tasks given by God and as modified by the Fall, Gen. 3:16-19. The sphere of the woman is to be domestic, Gen. 18:9; the sphere of the man is in the public square, Prov. 31:23. The nurture of children should recognize this distinction, encouraging modesty within their respective domains, inward and outward, Ps. 144:12 (the root word for plants [*nata*; נָטָה] connotes a stretching out, Isa. 51:16; the root word for corner [*zwh*; זָוִה], in corner stones, connotes something concealed, as in a granary, or garner [*mazu*; מָזוּ], Ps. 144:13). Thus, the *Midrash*, commenting, on Numbers 6:24, states that the keeping, or protection, which the LORD will give is with daughters because daughters must be protected. The rabbis said the blessing referred only to sons, not to daughters, because to have daughters without the means and knowledge to protect them was no blessing, Gen. 19:30-38; but to have daughters with the means and knowledge to protect them preserves their modesty and the purity and beauty of God's covenant community, Num. 30:3-5. Because the man and the woman occupy different domains, the modesty of the man is allowed to project its glory, or fitness for honor, into the public realm whereas it is the modesty of the woman to have her glory restricted from public view, 1 Cor. 11:7.

Question 6—*What does modesty have to do with personal identity?*

Answer—Because modesty is that disposition which determines the moral quality of our relationships to both God and man, modesty (or its lack) reflects that “inner-space” where true personal identity resides, Prov. 23:7. Hence, the things which a man desires, his wishes or appetites, actually declares itself in those outward displays demonstrating the direction of his devotion, Prov. 19:22. Modesty, however, is that which places the person possessed of it in a mental and spiritual place where he neither thinks too highly of himself, thereby severing himself from reality, nor does he think too lowly of others, thereby dismissing their society and severing himself from cultural ramifications, Rom. 12:3. Modesty, therefore,

is the thing required for all men, male and female, to have accurate formed notions of personal identity, Luke 18:9-14.

Question 7—*How does modesty relate to reality?*

Answer—Modesty, because it cherishes proper views of our relationships both to God and man, is calculated to undeceive because it submits to wisdom, which enables men to pass a true judgment and detect those fallacies which in some men's understanding usurp the place of right reason, Prov. 4:5-7. It is a fatal conceit of men to boast, or take pride, in that which is merely the gift and grant of God, Matt. 7:22, 23; to glory in those things which are gifts is to set aside the modesty necessary to enjoy them as gifts whereas modesty returns a disposition to reattach our notions with reality, Jer. 9:23, 24. It is no part of the glory of a man, therefore, to set aside modesty even in pursuit of what pertains to his own glory, Prov. 25:27. To do so, as fallen men are accustomed to do, is to leave off reality and embrace a lie and to allow culture to dictate reality, John 5:44. So, when we are commanded to keep ourselves distant from falsehood, we are being commanded to be modest, Ex. 23:7.

Question 8—*How does modesty relate to the question of that relation which should be observed between the sexes?*

Answer—Because modesty studies the moral quality of our relationships, it has much to say about the interactions between the sexes, undergirding all Christian charity, 1 Cor. 7:36, 37; 13:5. The lack of this modesty stands at the heart of the unseemliness of all sodomitic sins, Rom. 1:27. Moreover, this modesty includes all matters of our conversation, or conduct, including our appearance, speech and clothing, Ezek. 16:30; 1 Sam. 16:7. Modesty has respect to those necessary relations between men and women, which are the result of the priority of the creation of the man before the woman, Gen. 2:21, 22; 1 Tim. 2:13. The creation of the woman was designed to be “an help meet for him,” or one to succor him by corresponding to him (*lit.*, “by being in front of him”), Gen. 2:18. Godly (*i.e.*, modest) women reflect an inner quality which, after the Fall, is characterized as grace, Est. 2:15 (*chein*; חַיִּים). So, prior to the Fall, Eve provided a clear point of reflection for Adam to consider his relation before God, Gen. 2:23. Thus, this relation, when maintained in modesty, allows men to contemplate in women that modesty necessary to walk aright with God and man, Prov. 3:4.

But, it also has respect to those voluntary relations which result from secondary relations, such as marriage, 1 Cor. 7:2. Modesty should dictate the nature of all voluntary communications between the sexes, lest they cease to be moral, 1 Cor. 15:33.

Modesty also speaks to all public interactions between the sexes, determining the limits of acceptable behavior, 1 Tim. 2:12; Job 31:1; as well as private interactions where they are permitted, between those who are married, 1 Cor. 7:4.