**Immodesty & the Clothing of Wealth**

*by Harry Osborne*

The apostle Peter gives these instructions to women regarding the necessity of “chaste conduct accompanied with fear” in their daily living:

*Do not let your adornment be merely outward – arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel – rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God* (1 Pet. 3:3-4).

Notice that the clothing of wealth or luxury is contrasted with the proper behavior of godly women. That is not the only place in Scripture connecting these subjects. After commanding men to be characterized by holiness, the inspired apostle Paul instructed "that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works" (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

1st Timothy 2 says that modest apparel is associated with "propriety" (NKJV), "decency" (NIV), "shamefastness" (ASV) or "shamefacedness" (KJV). What does that mean? The original word from the Greek referred to a sense of shame or modesty which is rooted in the character. In other words, it is that inner decency which recognizes the lack of clothing to be shameful.

God’s word speaks of "nakedness" as **shameful** (Rev. 3:19; Isa. 47:3; 2 Sam. 6:20; Jer. 13:26). However, the Bible term "naked" does not only denote full nudity, but a lack of sufficient clothing to protect (Jas. 2:15-16). The book of Job refers to one who "stripped the naked of their clothing" (Job 22:6). How could one be stripped of clothing if already totally without clothes? Isaiah spoke of those who would “uncover the thigh” and declared the result: “your nakedness shall be uncovered” (Isa. 47:2-3). Many modern fashions (both for females and males) totally expose the thigh without any shame. But how does God view it? "Propriety" or "decency" causes one to blush if seen without being fully covered – a rare quality in our time! Yet, it is mandatory for those pleasing God.

The text of 1st Timothy 2 also says that modest clothing is associated with "moderation" or "sobriety." The word under consideration is not solely speaking of being free from intoxication due to alcohol, although that may be involved in some cases. The word simply describes a state of sound judgment. W.E. Vine makes these points on it (Expository Dict. of N.T. Words, vol. 4, p. 44-45):

It is that habitual inner self-government, with its constant rein on all the passions and desires, which would hinder the temptation to these from arising, or at all events from arising in such strength as would overbear the checks and barriers which "shamefastness" opposed to it.

"Sobriety" would keep one from wearing the "sexy," "revealing," "hot" or "provocative" styles currently in fashion. It would see such as the "attire of a harlot" (Prov. 7:10).

While "propriety and moderation" are the allies of modesty, the New Testament depicts the clothing characteristic of wealth as that which opposes modesty. Paul cautions against being clothed in "gold or pearls or costly clothing" (1 Tim. 2:9). Peter warns about "*wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel*" (1 Pet. 3:3). Were these writers merely prejudiced against the wealthy or is something else involved?

To answer that question, we need to find out what kind of clothing was the "costly clothing" or "fine apparel" of the New Testament time. This is not difficult since a great number of historical sources clearly and unanimously tell us about the fashions of the day. The following is an extended quote from Robert Collen's book, East to Cathay: The Silk Road (pages 44-46), dealing with the introduction of silk clothing into the first century Roman kingdom:

Silk in its natural state clung to the female form in a way that was infinitely more pleasing to the eye than Parthian banners. But Roman ladies did not stop at that. For one thing, there was not enough pure silk to go around at first. And, anyway, it was not sexy enough for those freewheeling days. So, they unraveled the close-woven Chinese fabric and rewove it into a flimsy gauze which left little to the imagination. So unlike Chinese silk was this Roman adaptation that the Chinese, when they eventually saw it, named it "ling," assuming that Rome was growing a special product of its own. For the average Roman girl-watcher those were golden years, but the moralists raised a fearful outcry. "I see clothes of silk, if clothes they can be called," wrote the philosopher Seneca (4 B.C. - A.D. 64), "affording protection neither to the body nor to the modesty of the wearer, and which are purchased for enormous sums, from unknown people." Pliny told of garments that "render women naked." Other writers waggishly referred to clothes "made of glass."

Please note that the expensive clothes of New Testament times were also the revealing clothes that lacked modesty. It was not a prejudice against wealthy people or luxuries that caused Bible writers to condemn "costly raiment." We know Lydia sold purple, a costly garment, but she was approved by God (Acts 16:14). Clearly, it was the indecency associated with such clothing that condemned it.

Late in the first century, Clement of Alexandria spoke of the same silk fashions as "fabrics foolishly thin, and of curious texture in weaving." He went on to speak of such as follows (The Instructor, II, xi):

For these superfluous and diaphanous (transparent - HRO) materials are proof of a weak mind, covering as they do the shame of the body with a slender veil. For luxurious clothing, which cannot conceal the shape of the body, is no more a covering. For such clothing, falling close to the body, takes its form more easily, and adhering as it were to the flesh, receives its shape, and marks out the woman's figure, so that the whole body is visible...

Clement said such clothing was associated with "vice" and not "modesty." The 2nd century Tertullian spoke of "garments which, light and thin, were to be heavy in price alone." He called them "prostitutionary garbs" appealing to "the provocative charms of apparel." He noted it was the opposite of "modesty."

In our time, the same is true. Modest clothing that covers the body is relatively inexpensive when contrasted with the price of the provocative styles in vogue among the fashion world. One can buy several decent outfits for the price of one fashionable swimsuit. Go to rack after rack in the clothing stores and you will find high necklines are cheaper than their plunging alternatives and high hemlines are more costly than full length. If the fashion is on the covers of Vogue and Glamour, it is most likely both expensive and revealing. The centuries have changed, but the principles have not! The immodest and indecent fashions typical of the more affluent world are no more tolerable to God today than they were when He condemned them through the New Testament writers. Let us not take our direction from the sinful fashions of our day, but from God.