



THE HEART OF MODESTY

Modesty is a staple of Christian teaching and living. It is one of many things that keeps us grounded in our faith, and it's often a visible reminder to us and others of what we believe and whom we serve. It's also something that should be instilled in us, especially when we're younger, or when we are teaching Christian principles to children.

I'm thankful that modesty was a principle that was taught in my own upbringing. Upon first glance, modesty brings to mind clothing choices, and that first impression is not wrong. What I wore wasn't ever drastically different than anyone else, except for the fact that hemlines were longer, layers were worn, and the words on my apparel—if any—were always positive messages.

However, modesty has often been seen as stifling. Given the fact that fashion today can be hit-or-miss in terms of coverage or even the words or design on a shirt, there's pressure from media to "fit in" in that sense. Also, there's the viewpoint that some have that modesty is unfairly directed at women because they have to cover up in order to prevent men from stumbling, and that men don't have to do anything, or can't help their sinful thoughts.

Well, I want to challenge that viewpoint.

As a young woman, I have been taught to cover up for that aforementioned reason, but I was also taught to cover up for family functions, school, and nice events, to name a few. Not only do I want to protect my brothers in Christ from sin, but I also want to show others around me that I'm a Christian in one of the simplest and most outward ways I can think of—by the way I dress.

Therefore, I personally believe that the heart of modesty is respect.

It makes sense because both men and women want to be respected. I feel like I'm respecting others when I dress appropriately, but I also feel that I am respecting myself because I'm taking care of the body that God gave me and dressing it in a way He would find honorable, and in turn, my peers will find it honorable as well. I'm making this decision based on 2 Timothy 9:10: "... in like manner also, 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."

Does this mean I can't braid my hair or wear gold or pearls or nice clothing? Of course not. Paul was just encouraging Timothy to let his audience know that it wasn't all about what these women wore or how they styled their hair. It was—and still is—more about inward character.

Dressing in a modest way actually helps with future first impressions. For example, say there are two college students. One is dressed to impress in a shirt that covers too little and a skirt that maybe covers half of that. Another is covered up, but that's not all that you see. You see her face and her smile, and you notice the way that she complimented the student next to her on her appearance or even his classwork. The latter student will be noticed not only for her appearance, but also for her inner beauty and character. Not to mention the former student may be quite cold.

Here's another aspect of modesty that we often don't think about: modesty in words and actions. Let's say that you're sitting at a table with fellow students or coworkers. You notice that one or two of your tablemates are making crude jokes at someone else's expense. These tablemates are seen among your peers as high on the social ladder. Do you sit there in awkward silence? Or do you speak up and defend the other person? Ephesians 4:29 says: "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." Flashy actions and shocking words may get attention in the moment, but a calm disposition will keep you in others' memory for years.

Let me address one final thing: What about guys? Modesty principles are often directed at women—and rightfully so—but they can also apply to men, too.

Let's say that you're in a grocery store. You're looking at produce to make a fruit salad for your family, and you decide to browse the apples. You pick up the first apple at the front of the display, and upon first glance, it looks good. Tasty, even. You almost buy it, but when you look at that piece of fruit, you notice that it's been bruised slightly, and that there are plenty of fingerprints from those who have touched and held it before, only to put it back. You put that same apple down, too, and pick up one from the back of the display. Sure enough, it's clean and ripe and ready for purchase.

My guess is that modesty is a lot like that from a guy's perspective. Sure, those who flaunt what they have and promote themselves to no end through dress, flashy gestures, and colorful language may be appealing at first, but it's the girls in the back—the girls who value themselves inside and out and who respect themselves—who are chosen in the long run when it comes to friendships and beyond. They are both respected by each other in the end, because they value the other's modesty in dress, words, and actions.

And that's just it: respect. When you value the other person over yourself, the rest will fall into place. ▲