

# “Modesty – Finding Common Ground”

## GOAL OF THE STUDY OF MODESTY

A bible discussion on modesty is controversial and there is no controversy about that. There are few topics within the Lord’s church that are more emotionally charged than that of modesty. The topic has been tagged as a “hot button” issue, and rightly so due to the emotions it elicits and the often heated discussions it creates. As we endeavor to reflect upon bible modesty, I am fully aware of its controversial and volatile status. I am fully aware of the emotions surrounding it and I am fully aware of the distinct viewpoints that exist. I pray that this study is in accordance with God’s revealed will and beneficial to God’s people.

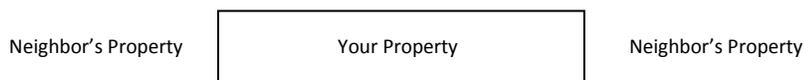
Within the Lord’s church, extensive debate about modesty has focused on a handful of specific garments for men and women. The ultimate end of this garment specific discussion has created basically two distinct viewpoints amongst God’s people. People view themselves as either for or against these select garments, and that constitutes the entirety of the modesty debate. It is within this dichotomous and emotionally charged environment we find difficulty discussing the topic. God’s people who desire to study and discuss modest apparel can relate to what one author said about this topic. He states, “Modesty is a controversial issue. No matter how the man of God approaches this subject, he will be judged a legalist or a libertarian by his audience (Jeff Pollard, *Public Undressing of America*, p.15).” His point about modesty is very valid. When discussing modesty and clothing one person will conclude you are too strict or conservative while another person will conclude you are too loose or liberal. These differences end up shutting down dialogue on the topic. It is because of this circumstance that I endeavor to consider the subject of modesty and present this study.

With humility I offer an observation. For years among God’s people the modesty debate has focused on the disagreement over specific garments (and don’t misunderstand, garments eventually need to be discussed). However, it appears that the garment-focused approach has caused many of God’s people on all sides of the discussion to lose track of modesty principles taught in scripture and any possible common ground that exists! As a collective group I encourage us to get back to basics and fundamentals. Instead of jumping to application where there is lots of disagreement over specific garments, let’s start our discussion with the bible principles of modesty where there should be some level of agreement and common ground. Instead of focusing on the disagreement of the application let’s focus on the bigger picture of the principles of modesty where there is some level of common ground that we can build from and come back to for a productive discussion. We need to be careful if we are getting caught up in a discussion of the application of modesty principles to specific garments when we do not first come to an understanding or agreement on the foundational principles of modesty. This has proven to be an unfruitful approach and dare I say dangerous.

In this study I do not plan on focusing on the “hot button” garments. To do so gets the cart ahead of the proverbial horse. The goal for our study is very straight forward. The goal is to discuss the principles or boundaries of modesty as they are outlined in the scriptures. In doing this, and not focusing on specific garments, I hope to find common ground to build from and get to a more fruitful discussion on the emotional topics surrounding specific garments – because eventually we need to apply these principles to garments. It is my sincere hope and prayer that this type of approach can promote and open up productive dialogue about the subject. For I fear the differences that exist on the topic have seized up any and all discussion about biblical modesty. This should not be. We need to be able to discuss this. Failing to do so has a terrible impact on the church today as well as the church of tomorrow. These are my sincere goals for this study – which I pray are clear.

## BOUNDARIES – IN GENERAL

To illustrate how to find common ground, let us consider the concept of biblical boundaries. A “boundary” by definition is something that marks a limit. Boundaries provide lines that we cannot cross, but also mark an area in which we are allowed to freely move. Consider the practical illustration of property lines or property boundaries.



The box represents a piece of property you own. The property lines are a boundary. They are a boundary that marks a limit. Within this box you are free to move and free to make certain choices about the property. However, whenever you cross that boundary you are now officially trespassing or violating a rule.

By and large the idea of boundaries is how we approach all bible subjects. We study the scriptures to set up lines that define the area of acceptable in God's eyes versus unacceptable in God's eyes. Explicit teachings, implicit teachings, commands, examples, and necessary inferences combine to provide us biblical boundaries on just about any topic (salvation, parenting, worship, etc.). As you and I study various topics we are always trying to find the boundaries that God put in place for acceptable versus unacceptable behavior. This is something we strive to do, and strive to do without bias.

However, don't forget that even though these boundaries mark limits, or lines we can't cross, they also provide an area in which a child of God has freedom to move and freedom to choose. What we are illustrating here is the idea of subordinate and coordinates aspects of a commands. God's people will always have boundaries, but within those boundaries there is still a level of freedom, flexibility and choices.

This concept of boundaries limiting, as well as providing an area of choice, applies to modesty just like all other bible topics. The apostle Paul clearly ties boundaries and modesty together in scripture.

1Tim 2:9 <sup>9</sup> likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,

Notice in verse nine there is a word that is translated "shamefacedness (KJV), propriety (NKJV), decency (NIV), modestly (NASB, ESV)." The meaning of this word is very interesting. Definitions offered are as follows:

*Vines:* "Modesty which is fast or rooted in character...would always restrain...from an unworthy act..."

*Walter Lock:* "...shrinks from overpassing the limits of womanly reserve and modesty (p.31)."

*William Hendrickson:* "...indicates a sense of shame, a shrinking from trespassing the boundaries of propriety (p.106)."

*Jeff Pollard:* Shamefacedness, "...means that modesty knows the boundaries and desires to stay within them (p.20)."

Inherent in the Greek word for "shamefacedness (KJV)" is recognition of boundaries or limits. We say this because of the definition itself. The word carries with it the idea that when a person steps over boundaries they feel shame or remorse. Not overstepping limits means one recognizes limits; not trespassing boundaries means one recognizes boundaries. Paul commands that a woman dresses with an attitude that understands God's boundaries for clothing which they desire to honor. To honor God is to not venture from acceptable attire to unacceptable attire. **I urge and implore us all to remember that biblical modesty recognizes that there are boundaries that should not be crossed.**

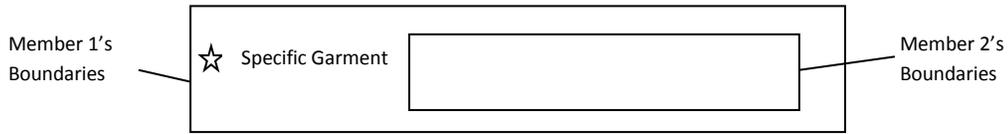
Biblical modesty is not a free for all. Biblical modesty is not without limitations. Biblical modesty is not without lines that define acceptable versus unacceptable attire. Too many people have tried to eliminate any God given standards for clothing to make it a free for all. God provides boundaries that regulate or limit what we can and cannot wear. However, before you get all upset and feel that God is a kill-joy don't forget that these boundaries also provide flexibility, freedom and choice within them. Like other bible topics, there are lines that God's people cannot cross but within the God-given boundaries provided they have ability to choose.

I encourage us to choose to discuss modest clothing from this boundary approach, because in this writer's humble opinion boundaries are the root of disagreements on modesty. Let me illustrate with our box pictures that we have been using. Two members of the Lord's church end up discussing modest clothing and the conversation gets focused on one or two specific garments.

☆ Specific Garment

The conversation ends up rather long, the conversation gets rather emotional and the entire conversation has centered on the rightness or wrongness of this specific garment. A verse or two is thrown out, but rarely are biblical principles of modesty even discussed or applied. Both parties walk away from the discussion disagreeing. Both parties walk away a bit frustrated. Both parties walk away feeling as if they have absolutely no common

ground with their brother or sister on the topic of modest clothing. What just happened in this conversation? Let's apply our boundaries diagram.



Do you see the problem? These two members of the Lord's church had a long emotional conversation about a specific garment and the garment in question was not the root of their disagreement. The root of the disagreement was a difference in understanding God's boundaries. There will never be resolution unless the two parties step away from discussing a specific garment and begin to talk about the principles that define the boundaries of acceptable versus unacceptable. To "Member 1" the garment under consideration was acceptable because it fit within his or hers understanding of God's boundaries. While for "Member 2" the garment under consideration was not acceptable because it was outside his or hers understanding of God's boundaries. There are a couple of things that I ask you to consider about this conversation we have illustrated:

1) THE TYPICAL OUTCOME OF THIS TYPE OF CONVERSATION.

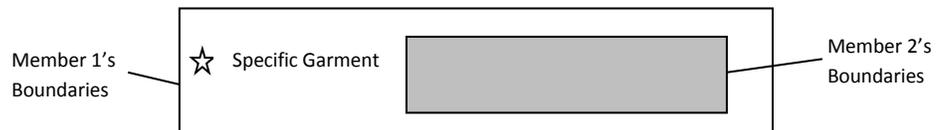
The aforementioned outcome is typically the end of conversation about modesty. These two individuals may have had their last conversation on the matter for some time. It is highly possible that outcome is closing up the conversation on modesty. This is unfortunate and this is very detrimental to the cooperation of these brethren, puts strain on the relationship, and threatens the peace that exists between brethren. Although garments need to eventually be discussed, this garment first approach (while ignoring differences relative to boundaries) has actually hampered discussion rather than helped it. A conversation that doesn't allow for follow up is a fruitless conversation. The church cannot afford to have dialogue amongst God's people dry up over such an important and challenging topic.

2) IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THESE TWO MEMBERS WILL MAKE MUCH PROGRESS ON WHETHER OR NOT A SPECIFIC GARMENT IS RIGHT OR WRONG UNTIL THEY ADDRESS THEIR DIFFERENCES IN UNDERSTANDING GOD'S BOUNDARIES FOR MODEST CLOTHING.

When members disagree on whether or not a particular garment is right or wrong, they need to stop, step back shift their focus to the bigger picture. Focusing on the garment itself will not reconcile their differences. The focus of the conversation needs to shift to both parties understanding of God's boundaries for modesty. The discussion needs to center around why one individual understand God's boundaries to be a little tighter, while another understands God's boundaries to be a little larger. Because until boundaries are aligned it is unlikely that they will agree on the garment. To focus on the garment at the expense of discussing the boundaries is, in many ways, ignoring the heart of the matter.

3) FOCUSING ON THE DISAGREEMENT SURROUNDING A SPECIFIC GARMENT OVERLOOKS ALL THE COMMON GROUND.

Let's go back for a moment to our picture that describes this conversation.



When two brethren spend all this time and energy focusing on their disagreement over a specific garment, they walk away perceiving that they are worlds apart on the topic. That they have nothing in common and questions their relationship with their brother or sister. However, notice what they miss by not talking about boundaries? Even though their understanding of God's boundaries is different, notice all of the area they have in common. But the focus on the garment, not the boundaries, ignores the common ground they share. Shifting the focus from the

specific garment to the boundaries would continue to highlight differences, but it would also highlight the common ground they have. A place they could go back to and build from. I am convinced, and submit to you today, that brethren who disagree over a specific garment would be surprised by how much they actually have in common!

Hopefully this illustration depicts the need and the reason why we need to step back and review again the biblical principles of modesty. The Lord's church will struggle to come to an agreement on any garments if we do not first agree upon the biblical boundaries, principles, and teachings of modest clothing. So again, in the effort of creating some productive dialogue I will attempt to approach modesty not by discussing specific garments and working back to scriptural principles, but we will start with bible principles with the hope that we can then have productive discussions about specific garments.

### **BOUNDARIES OF MODESTY – FINDING COMMON GROUND**

It has taken a while to get to this point but it brings us to defining the boundaries of modesty, and I pray some common ground for God's people to work from. These principles would be the ground work for productive discussions about specific garments. Although we will mention a few extreme garments along the way for illustration purposes, our focus will be on the principles that make up the boundaries of modesty. Consider the following principles:

#### **1) MODESTY IS MORE THAN CLOTHES - BUT INCLUDES CLOTHES.**

The English word "modest" or "modesty" is not a frequently used word in the N.T. As a matter of fact the English word is only found once in the KJV, and the Greek word is only found twice. We will go ahead and read both of those instances.

1Tim 2:9 <sup>9</sup> likewise also that women should adorn themselves in **respectable (KJV = modest)** apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,

1Tim 3:2 <sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, **respectable (KJV = Good behavior)**, hospitable, able to teach,

The Greek word used in these passages for modest is <kosmios>. Various sources define this word in the following ways:

*Vines:* "orderly, well arranged, decent, harmonious arrangement. The well-ordering is not of dress and demeanor only, but of the inner life...expressing itself in the outward conversation."

*Strongs:* "orderly, of good behavior."

*A.T. Robertson:* "well arranged or becoming."

Notice if you will that "modesty" is a term, although typically tied to just clothing, is more than just clothing. Modesty includes a person's behavior, their heart, and their demeanor. Modesty is a large topic that extends beyond just a person's appearance. However, even though we agree that modesty includes more than clothing **don't forget it still includes clothing**. This is said because there are those who try to take the idea of modesty and emphasize the attitude and demeanor side at the expense of the outward appearance. They will say that there are few boundaries to modesty or how the body is adorned. They will falsely claim that it really doesn't matter what you wear because modesty is just about the heart and what's inside a person. This is overlooking 1Timothy 2:9 where Paul clearly includes clothing as part of modesty. Notice this passage again.

1Tim 2:9 <sup>9</sup> likewise also that women should adorn themselves in **respectable (KJV = modest) apparel**, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,

Paul speaks of “modest apparel” or “respectable apparel.” Paul links “modesty <kosmios>” to “apparel <katastole>.” To deny that clothing is not part of modesty is to deny what the apostle Paul taught. He clearly links the two concepts of modesty and clothing together. I agree that modesty is more than clothing, but it does include clothing. Something often overlooked, it is true that mankind is unable to know what is in the heart of another man, but a person’s heart is demonstrated through overt behaviors and actions. Recall the principle that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” in Matthew 15:18; Luke 6:45; and Romans 10:10. A person’s heart is demonstrated overtly. **Clothing is one of the outward manifestations of a person’s inward convictions regarding God’s teachings on modesty.** The inward man and the heart is important but that does not negate one’s outward appearance. As previously stated, the goal of our study is to develop the boundaries of modesty based upon the teachings and principles in scripture. This is one bible principle that I would like to think we can all agree on to find some common ground to start production conversation.

## 2) MODESTY IS A COMMAND

Let’s read the two verses where the Greek word for modesty is found again.

1Tim 2:9 9 likewise also that women should adorn themselves in **respectable (KJV = modest)** apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,

1Tim 3:2 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, **respectable (KJV = Good behavior)**, hospitable, able to teach,

There are a couple of things we want to notice about these verses relative to the command aspect of them:

### a) MODESTY IS A COMMAND AND THEREFORE NOT AN OPTION.

Whether it is because of culture or because of the controversy surrounding this topic, modest clothing is sometimes trivialized or viewed as insignificant to the Christian. This should NOT be the case. When the bible commands a certain behavior, it is not optional. Relative to modest clothing we are not dealing with unclear language. Putting together and harmonizing 1Timothy 2:9 and 1Timothy 3:2 we see clear commandments from God. **Modest clothing is not an option for a child of God; it is something that must be practiced.** Controversy, culture, or frustration does not change this.

This really should be no surprise to God’s people.

1Cor 6:19-20 <sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,  
<sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

The bible points out that our body is not our own; our physical body is to be used to bring glory to God. So why anyone would be surprised that God is concerned with how we cover or cloth this body that is supposed to bring glory to God? **It makes logical sense that if our bodies are to bring glory to God, what covers or adorns our body needs to bring glory to God.** The concept of using our body to glorify God, and modest clothing are interconnected, they go hand in hand, and they are woven together. Because of the culture we live in, this is a truth that needs driven home and emphasized. The world about us promotes the idea that your body is your own and you should do with it and dress it how you wish. The idea of personal freedom and personal expression through clothing is said to be a right in the times we live in. On some levels that is true (recall boundaries do give some freedom of choice) but the intent behind these cultural ideas by and large opposes what the bible teaches. The bible teaches that your body is not your own and in all ways your body should be

used to glorify him (including the clothing on your body). 1Timothy 2:9 and 1Timothy 3:2 make it abundantly clear that modesty is not an option for the people of God, but a requirement.

b) **MODESTY APPLIES TO WOMEN AND MEN.**

Recall the context of these two passages. 1Timothy 2:9 is addressed to women.

1Timothy 3:2 is addressed to men. It is true that 1Tim 3:2 is dealing with requirements for elders, however, recall that the requirements for elders are not anything special or unique that is not a requirement for every child of God.

Therefore, modesty is a command to both men and women. Women tend to get most of the attention relative to modesty, and there are numerous reasons to that, but do not let that blind you to the fact that it applies to both genders.

As we reflect upon 1Timothy 2:9 and 1Timothy 3:2 and other passages, amongst all the controversy and emotion that surrounds this topic do not forget that modest clothing is a command of God. It may be uncomfortable to discuss at times, it may be frustrating, it may be difficult, but it is all worthwhile because modest clothing is a command of God. Again, as our stated goal, I am trying to develop and define the boundaries of modesty relative to the teachings and principles in the word of God. I would like to think that this bible command is something that we can all agree on to find some common ground to build from.

### 3) **CLOTHING COMMUNICATES SOMETHING**

Every action a person takes communicates something about them. This is the principle behind various passages (see Mat 5:16; 1Cor 6:20; Col 4:17; 2Thess 1:12). You can communicate to others various things about yourself without ever saying a word. The bible teaches that we communicate to others in various avenues or ways.

1Tim 4:12 <sup>12</sup> Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers ***an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.***

Notice that Paul tells Timothy to communicate the truths of heaven (or be an example) by our conduct and an obedient faith – these are overt behaviors that others can see. From the moment you or I walk into a room we begin to communicate with others. Obviously the things you verbalize communicate to others, but there are non-verbal actions that also communicate to others. Your treatment of others communicates something about you, your body language (i.e. smiles or frowns) communicate something about you, and yes your clothing or attire communicate something about you. Jeff Pollard comments, “...women and men need to clearly understand that clothes are a language, a true body language, whether we realize it or not (Jeff Pollard, Public Undressing of America, p.68).” A brother at my home congregation has said for years, “clothes are a non-verbal form of communication.” This is very true. We don’t have to look far to see this truth. What a person wears can communicate something about their job (i.e. shirt with a company logo, overall’s with paint); what a person wears can communicate a team they support (i.e. Yankee’s hat, Piston’s shirt); what a person wears can communicate where they attended school (i.e. Michigan Wolverines attire) - and the list goes on and on. The bible also supports the idea that clothes communicate.

Exodus 28:2-4 <sup>2</sup> And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty.

<sup>3</sup> You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood.

<sup>4</sup> These are the garments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a sash. They shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons to serve me as priests.

The priest’s garments were set aside for the priests only. These articles of clothing communicated who they were and the role they filled. The garments themselves were also highly symbolic (i.e.

Ex 28:21...the twelve stones on the breastplate represented the twelve tribes of Israel). Symbolism, whether in writing or in clothing, communicates. These articles of clothing communicated something about the people wearing them.

Matt 23:5 <sup>5</sup> They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long,

This small verse clearly shows that clothing and ornamentation communicates something about a person. The Pharisees wore certain items to purposely be seen by others. The phylacteries (or boxes with scripture) tied to their heads or on their arms, combined with long fringes on their clothes was to communicate to others their holiness. Now of course, the problem with the Pharisees was that their heart was not right and Jesus condemns their motives, but the truth remained that their clothes communicated something. Clothing demonstrated and told others things about them. Paul agrees with this.

1Tim 2:9-10 <sup>9</sup> likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,  
<sup>10</sup> but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.

The keynote verse typically used on modesty shows that modest clothing and ornamentation is to communicate something. Specifically he states that their clothes and ornamentation should “profess (or communicate) godliness.”

Douglas Phillips made this observation about clothing. He said, “dress (clothing) is not neutral (Jeff Pollard, Public Undressing of America p.11).” Brethren, we need to understand that clothes are not neutral they communicate something to others! Many get upset when others draw conclusions about them by the clothes they choose to wear. They will say it is unfair because God looks at the heart and you don’t know my heart. It is true that I can’t know your heart, and you can’t know mine. But one needs to be very careful here. If those conclusions are drawn based upon personal preferences and not biblical principles then then a person’s frustration is understandable and on many levels warranted. Also, if those conclusions prompt mean spirited or ungodly behavior then a person’s frustration is again understandable. **However, if those conclusions are drawn based upon biblical principles and do not prompt mean spirited or ungodly behavior then the judged person really has no right to complain.** It is a tough pill to swallow but a bible truth none the less. One cannot negate the need for biblically acceptable clothing, simply because God looks at the heart. One cannot tell a brother or sister they can’t question or draw conclusions of another’s clothing simply because God looks at the heart. This ignores the fact that God is actually concerned about both – the heart and the clothing of a person!

Michelle Brock in her book on modesty very succinctly pointed out why God is concerned with both the heart and the clothes. She observed, “Many women (her book is addressed to women) are bothered because people judge them by what they wear. They know that God sees their heart, but they forget that people can’t see their heart: they see only the outside (Michelle Brock, What Is Modesty, p.54).” Michelle’s book addresses women, but the comment can be applied to both genders. We concede that humans cannot see a person’s heart. Yet that doesn’t mean clothing doesn’t matter; as a matter of fact it actually shows exactly the reason why clothing matters. Your heart is demonstrated, in part, by what you wear or don’t wear. Clothing is part of an outward manifestation of inward convictions. Clothing communicates something about your beliefs and standards.

So this begs the question, what does your clothing choices communicate to others?

- Does your clothing choices reflect an “it’s my body and I’ll dress it how I want to” look?
- Does your clothing choices reflect an “it’s my Christian liberty and I’ll dress how I want” look?

- Does your clothing choices reflect a “look at me and check me out” look?
- Does your clothing choices reflect a reverence and respect for God, his word, and using your body to communicate and glorify God?

**Instead of trying to ignore clothing, or regulate it to something that doesn't matter, it is time for God's people to embrace the fact that clothing matters and clothing communicates something about us!** Again, we are endeavoring to establish teachings and principles that define the boundaries of modesty. I pray this is a bible principle that we can all find common ground on.

#### 4) MODEST CLOTHING COVERS THE BODY

Clothing is designed to cover the body or cover nakedness. This is seen from the very beginning of time and record of human history in scripture. In the garden there was a time when Adam and Eve were insufficiently clothed, and a time when they were sufficiently clothed. Compare Genesis 3:7-11 to Genesis 3:21. A fundamental principle of clothing is to cover the body or cover nakedness. Lack of coverage or insufficient coverage is unacceptable to God.

An important point to note is that it is possible to have clothes on the body but still be, by biblical standards, naked or unclothed.

Gen 3:10 <sup>10</sup> And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." [naked even though according to verse 7 they sewed fig leaves together for clothing].

Isa 47:1-4 <sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Take the millstones and grind flour, put off your veil, strip off your robe, uncover your legs, pass through the rivers.

<sup>3</sup> Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your disgrace shall be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no one.

<sup>4</sup> Our Redeemer—the LORD of hosts is his name—is the Holy One of Israel.

A person does not have to be completely nude to be immodestly dressed. Scripture points out that a person can be wearing clothes but yet be immodestly dressed. Modest clothing is not simply wearing a garment, but modest clothing as taught in scriptures is wearing a garment that properly covers or conceals the body. By and large, amongst God's people and amongst the religious world at large all agree that clothing should cover the body. This is something that for the most part is without controversy. However, the controversy and disagreement surrounds how much of the body modest clothing needs to cover. As previously noted, it is possible to be wearing clothes but still be considered immodestly dressed, so we need to go to the scriptures to define the minimal amount of covering. We need to go to scripture to understand the boundary of what is acceptable covering and what is unacceptable covering. To accomplish this let's look at the various times in scripture that God provided or was directly involved in clothing for his people. Because God is directly involved in the selection or design of these garments they represent a picture of what is acceptable to God. We will look at the four passages of scriptures. These four passages will provide for us the boundary for the minimal amount of coverage that God approved for clothing:

##### 1) GARDEN OF EDEN – GENESIS 3:7,10, 21

After sinning Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness (see Genesis 3:7). This nakedness has spiritual implications and meanings no doubt, but it obviously had to do with physical nakedness as well. The proof of this is seen by the fact that they made physical coverings or “loincloths” out of fig leaves. The garment described in Genesis 3:7 is translated as “aprons (KJV), coverings (NKJV), loin coverings (NASB), or loincloths (ESV).” The Hebrew word defined by various sources:

*H.C. Leupold* “girdles (p.154)

*Jeff Pollard* "girdle, loin covering, belt, loin cloth, armour (p.25)."  
*Strong's* "belt, apron, armour, girdle."

By definition, the garment described here was not much. It covered at best from about the waist or beltline to maybe the top of the thigh. These loincloths were man's answer to their physical nakedness and shame after the fall. The loincloths were insufficient for several reasons, but one key reason is that they did not cover enough. This is seen by Adam's comment while talking to God. Notice Gen 3:10.

Gen 3:10 <sup>10</sup> And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

Adam says that he hid because he was physically naked. However, Adam was not completely nude at this time. Adam and Eve were wearing the loincloths they made! Adam states that he is naked while wearing the coverings he had made. Adam recognized that the loincloths were insufficient to cover his body. God also recognizes that the loincloths that Adam and Eve made were insufficient coverings.

Gen 3:21 <sup>21</sup> And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

God's disapproval of the loincloths is seen in that he provides a replacement. God provides the acceptable garment or coat to Adam and Eve. This article of clothing in Genesis 3:21 is translated as "coats (KJV), tunics (NKJV), or garments (NASB/ESV)."

The Hebrew word <kethoneth> is defined by various sources:

*Jeff Pollard* A covering "from...neck to...knees (p.25)."  
*Strong's* "root meaning to cover; a shirt, coat, garment, robe."  
*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* "(Greek chiton), a long-sleeved tunic."

This marks the first of some 26 times that times this word will be used in the O.T. to describe a garment. Recall who is the author of Genesis – Moses. Moses lived a long time, hundreds and hundreds of years removed from Adam. Under inspiration he is looking back and recording the events of creation. Moses uses a Hebrew word <kethoneth> that he will end up using another 17 times in the Pentateuch. There is ample scriptural and historical evidence, about this garment. It is repeatedly used of a garment (with or without sleeves) that covers one's body from the neck to the knees. Consider what we see then in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve after sinning recognized that they were physically naked and created garments that barely covered their body, and God replaced them with a garment covered them from the neck to the knees. So we have God, directly involved in physical clothing and the coverage is from the neck to the knees.

## 2) PRIESTLY GARMENTS – EXODUS 28:3-4, 42

The evaluation of the priestly garments is in many ways an extension of Genesis 3.

Ex 28:3-4 <sup>3</sup> You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood.

<sup>4</sup> These are the garments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a sash. They shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons to serve me as priests.

Consider the circumstances of Exodus 28. Here we have God again directly involved in the selection of clothing for his people. Exodus 28:3 informs us that the men were "inspired" or under God's influence. God was directly involved. Like Genesis 3, we can gather more information about the minimal amount of coverage God provided for the priests. Numerous garments are listed in Exodus 29:4 but notice if you will the

fourth garment listed. It is the inner garment worn under the robe and would be the more revealing of the two garments. The fourth garment listed in verse four is translated as “a brodered coat (KJV), a skillfully woven tunic (KJV), a tunic of checkered work (NASB), a coat of checkered work (ESV).” The Hebrew word here is <*kethoneth*>, the same exact word found in Genesis 3:21 for the “coats” of skin God gave Adam and Eve. Definitions remain the same...it was a garment that covered from the neck to the knee. We see consistency from God. God again is directly involved in clothing his people and he has them covered from the neck to knees. There is also one additional piece of information that the Exodus passage provides.

Ex 28:42 <sup>42</sup> You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh. They shall reach from the hips to the thighs;

God also has an additional undergarment made for the priests. This article of clothing is translated as “breeches (KJV, NASB), trousers (NKJV), or undergarments (ESV).” It is a new garment. This is the first time this garment is mentioned in scripture, and is the first of the five times it is mentioned. This passage, as much as any on the topic, is controversial and emotional. This passage is made to say more than it does by some, but less than it does by others. Notice again the purpose of this garment. What was the purpose? The purpose was “to cover their naked flesh” in the presence of God. But notice also that God provides information on length in this passage as to what is acceptable while in his presence. And although there are some questions regarding the exact length evidence seems to point to a length consistent with the tunic – covering down to the knees. Here in Exodus 28, like Genesis 3:21 we have God directly involved in physical clothing of his people and the coverage is from the neck to the knees.

### 3) JESUS CLOTHING – JOHN 19:23-24

As we reflect on acceptable clothing for God’s people, it makes logical sense to take into consider what deity wore while in the flesh. We want to take note of what Jesus wore while here on the earth. The bible actually provides for us a rather clear picture of what Jesus adorned himself with during his earthly ministry. There are several passages we could look at but we will go to the hours leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion.

Matt 27:31 <sup>31</sup> And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

After Jesus was stripped, forced to wear the scarlet robe and crown of thorns, mocked and beaten he was then put back in “his own clothes.” What were his clothes? What was Jesus wearing? The answers to these questions are found recorded amongst the events of the cross.

John 19:23 <sup>23</sup> When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic.

But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, The clothes the soldiers put back on Jesus were the same clothes that he was wearing at Golgotha. Notice that there are two distinct articles of clothing listed in John 19:23-24. There are the “garments” that was divided and the “tunic” that lots were cast for.

The first article of Jesus’ clothing listed in this passage is translated “garments (KJV, NJKV, ESV),” or “outer garments (NASB).” The Greek word used is <*himation*> which at times can mean clothing in general, but it can also mean outer garment. The context in John 19:23, speaks of two different actions taken for two separate articles of clothing. Therefore, the context demands that <*himation*> mean outer garment.

*Vines* “When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took His garments...his outer garments.”

*A.T. Robertson* "...outer clothes"

*Barnes* "...denotes the outer garment..."

Jesus wore the typical outer garment of the day which was rather large robe like garment that was worn over the undergarment.

The second article of Jesus' clothing listed in John 19:23 is translated "coat (KJV), or tunic (NKJV, NASB, ESV)." This is that undergarment that the <imation> or outer robe was worn over. The Greek word used for the second garment mentioned is <chiton>.

*Vines* "...denotes the inner vest or under garment..."

*Bible Encyclopedia* "The simplest form of it was without sleeves and reached to the knees or sometimes to the ankles."

Many scholars point out that the Hebrew word <kethoneth> under the O.T. was nearly identical to the Roman tunic of Jesus' day. This undergarment that Jesus was wearing covered him from the neck to the knees. The clothing Jesus chose to wear is consistent with the O.T. standard of being covered from the neck to the knees.

#### 4) GARMENTS GIVEN IN HEAVEN – REV 6:11

The last passage we will consider relative to the minimal amount of coverage that God approved for clothing is found in the book of Revelation.

Rev 6:11 <sup>11</sup> Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

Here again we find God directly involved in providing clothing to his people. The article of clothing in Revelation 6:11 is translated as "robe" or "robes" in all of the trusted translations (KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV). The Greek word is that of <stole>.

*Vines* "...a stately robe, a long garment reaching to the feet..."

*A.T. Robertson* "...a flowing robe."

*Strong's* "...long clothing, long robe."

The <stole> or robe that God provided the faithful in heaven would be seen as going from the neck to the feet. It is understood that there is symbolic significance to this picture, but it was a picture none the less. These were words that described what John saw and what John saw was faithful children of God given a robe that went from the neck to the feet. It is no accident that God did not provide swimsuits. He gave garments that provided adequate coverage. Now this coverage is more than the others we have covered (neck to feet vs. neck to knees), but it provides further evidence that God desires his people to be adequately covered.

We have looked at four sets of passages (two in the O.T. and two in the N.T.) where we find God directly involved in clothing. In these passages we can see that there was a basic or minimal amount of the body that clothing covered and God was directing this. I submit to you today that this minimal standard of covering remains the standard for God's people today. God expects his people to be covered from the neck to the knees. God has directly dictated under both the O.T. and N.T. the same standard of coverage for clothing, and it is a standard that is to be applied until his return. We understand that clothing styles and clothing types constantly change, but this principle (and others for that matter) do not change.

We have previously noted the dangers of the garment-focused discussion on modesty. However, we did mention after the boundaries or principles are established (such as the amount of coverage) it is then necessary to discuss specific garments. So let's apply the principle to garments, not to be controversial, but for reflection and illustration. The principle is that modest clothing is acceptable to God when it adequately covers the body and the minimal amount of coverage is from the neck to the knees. Consider then the implications of this principle. What are

some garments, styles, or trends that would be deemed unacceptable in God's eyes because they violate being covered from the neck to the knee?

a) *Swimsuits for men and women.*

God's principle is being covered from the neck to the knees and typical swim suits (for men or women) barely cover anything and definitely don't cover from the neck to the knees. Therefore, applying this principle to common swimsuits would be outside of the boundaries of acceptable clothing to God.

b) *Short shorts/daisy dukes/mini-skirts.*

These are clothes that fail to reach the knees. Any garment a man or woman wears that fails to reach the knees would be deemed unacceptable to God.

c) *Tank tops with thin straps over the shoulder.*

This can be found on women (spaghetti straps on shirts/dresses) or men (work out tank tops designed to be revealing). The point is this violates being covered from neck to knees and would be unacceptable to God.

d) *Halter tops.*

This violates being covered from neck to knees and falls outside the boundaries of acceptable attire to God.

e) *Men going shirtless.*

This violates being covered from neck to knees and would not be accepted by God.

Notice the importance of understanding the boundaries or principles of modesty. You and I may disagree on some of the specific garments just mentioned, but the disagreement will never be solved by just beating on the garment itself. The difference will never be solved by arguing over the origins of various garments, because that becomes rather problematic. We need to step back and work through our differences on this boundary or principle before solving our garment disagreement. I did not bring up the aforementioned specific garments to be controversial. I brought them up because after discussing the boundaries or principles of modesty we need to ultimately be able to apply the principle or the principle is rendered useless.

Another point to be discussed under this topic of covering the body is the tightness of clothing. If a man or woman is wearing a garment that "looks like it was painted on" or tight enough to show every detail of the form of the body, is the body really covered? No. As one sister accurately observed, those clothes "are just a different skin color" because they are so tight. Consider how this would apply to trends like leggings or spandex. From a principle standpoint, tight clothes that reveal rather than conceal is really NOT covering anything, therefore violating the principle of covering the body.

Before we move on, there is one other thing that we need to briefly consider about this principle of modest clothing that covers from the neck to the knees. Setting the boundaries of how much clothing should cover is tied to the sufficiency of the scriptures – it is important for us to reflect upon this.

2Peter 1:3 <sup>3</sup> His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,  
1Tim 3:16-17 <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,  
<sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

We correctly believe and teach that the bible is sufficient for everything a child of God needs. Whether that is how to be saved, or how to worship, or how to live a holy life. Relative to the topic under consideration, the bible clearly commands that we are to wear modest clothes. The bible also clearly teaches that modest clothes cover the body. Scripturally it is possible to wear clothes but still be naked. However, consider the implication for those who deny that the bible provides any minimal amount of coverage. They would then proclaim that the bible teaches that modest clothes are required, but the bible does not provide the guideline of how much must be

covered. For those who hold this position, aren't they teaching the bible is NOT sufficient? They have God providing a command with no principles to direct fulfilling that command. This is a difficult question, but one that needs to be pondered. **The correct approach is that God commands us to be covered and provides us the standard for the minimal amount of covering because his word is sufficient.** Denying that God provides any standard for how much of the body clothes needs to cover, really brings into question the sufficiency of the scriptures. Because otherwise you would have God telling you to be covered, but not telling you how much. Which is the definition of insufficient, is it not?

I submit to you that the minimal amount of coverage is from the neck to the knees. Should you reject this, my question back to you then is what is your standard for how much of the body clothes must cover? And more importantly where does that standard come from? Remember your standard must come from the word of God. If it does not you are at best ignoring the word of God or denying the sufficiency of scripture. Again, we are endeavoring to establish teachings and principles that define the boundaries of modesty. I pray this is a bible principle that we can find common ground on...or have open dialogue to develop common ground around this boundary of modesty.

## 5) MODEST CLOTHING IS APPROPRIATE

The last principle that we want to look at is principle of the appropriateness of clothing. Reaching back to one of our previous principles, clothing is a nonverbal form of communication. Because of this there are certain garments that are acceptable for certain occasions, and certain garments are unacceptable for other occasions. This is the idea behind appropriateness. Not all garments are acceptable for all occasions.

We understand this from a practical standpoint. Consider the following everyday illustrations:

- a) *Corporate Setting.* Pajamas are not acceptable at an office because they are inappropriate.
- b) *Construction Site.* Tuxedos are not acceptable at the construction site because they are inappropriate.

The bible recognizes, honors, and actually teaches this same principle. We want to consider of a few aspects of the principle that modest clothing is appropriate.

### 1) APPROPRIATE CLOTHING IS FITTING FOR THE OCCASION.

The bible on numerous occasions respects and honors that certain circumstances call for certain appropriate garments. I submit to you two illustrations.

#### i. *Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matt 22:11-14)*

A king is giving a wedding feast for his son. He has some issues with the original guests and eventually gathered in the general public. Upon looking over the guests gathered he sees one without a wedding garment.

Matt 22:11-12 <sup>11</sup> "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment.

<sup>12</sup> And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.

It is true that there are spiritual principles in mind here, but they are drawn from the accepted truth that for an occasion like a wedding there were appropriate or expected garments. Not all garments are acceptable and appropriate for every occasion.

#### ii. *Peter going to see Jesus (John 21:1-8)*

Recall the context. Jesus has died and this is shortly after his resurrection. Jesus has revealed himself but went away yet again. Peter and others go

fishing. While fishing Jesus reveals himself again to them. Notice what Peter does.

John 21:7 <sup>7</sup> That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea.

Peter grabs his outer garment and heads towards Jesus. This did not mean that Peter was naked. He was wearing his tunic or undergarment, but had taken his outer garment off. Why did he put his outer garment back on before seeing Jesus? He did so out of respect for Jesus, he did not feel it was appropriate for him to come before his king so casually. Oh that more of God's people would have this kind of attitude. Peter's behavior recognizes respectful and appropriate attire for certain occasions, which in this case, was standing before the Messiah.

This principle of clothing that is fitting or respectful of the occasion is helpful on a practical level for many Christians today. There are times you will hear people lamenting the principles and bible teachings on modesty. They feel that these boundaries are so constrictive that they do not feel attractive, or for lack of a better term they don't feel "sexy." This is where the principle of appropriateness comes in.

Heb 13:4 <sup>4</sup> Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled...

Notice what the Hebrew writer says. He states that the marriage bed is undefiled (or not sinful) and honorable (or acceptable to God). God actually permits you to dress in a sensual way, but only within the confines of marriage. A child of God cannot go to work, go to the store, or come to worship dressing sensually because it is inappropriate. However, they are free to dress that way for their spouse. Michelle Brock made this statement, "Being sensual is both appropriate and pure in...context...Being sensual is a good thing, only in the right place; your bedroom (p.47)." Modest clothing is appropriate to the occasion or circumstance.

## 2) APPROPRIATE CLOTHING DEMONSTRATES GENDER DISTINCTION.

As far as the modest clothing discussion goes this is probably one of the principles and passages that is most talked about.

Deut 22:5 <sup>5</sup> "A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.

This is another one of those passages that some try to make too much out of, while others try to trivialize it. In this passage God clearly states cross dressing and trying to pass as the opposite gender is unacceptable. This is further emphasized in the N.T. where gender roles and gender distinctions are further emphasized (1Cor 11:1-16, Eph 5:22-33, etc.). God made two distinct genders with distinct roles and he never desired that they would adorn themselves in a way that would blur those lines. The bible does teach that appropriate clothing demonstrates gender distinction.

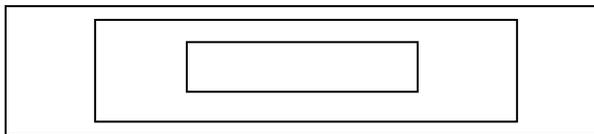
We have looked at five principles or teachings that make up the boundaries of modesty. To recap, the five teachings and principles that we have presented as boundaries for modesty are:

- 1) Modesty is more than clothes...but includes clothes.
- 2) Modesty is a command
- 3) Clothing communicates
- 4) Modest clothes cover the body (from the neck to the knees)
- 5) Modest clothes are appropriate.

Let's go back to our illustration on boundaries. We have presented to you a set of boundaries.



As we went through this study you may not agree with these boundaries. Your boundaries may be tighter than what has been presented. Yours may be larger than what was presented.



If that is the case it's a good starting point for a discussion to try and find common ground. It's a good point to start because we have identified the root of our disagreement. This is where we need to work from. It gives us a place to highlight differences, but also some common ground to work from.

### REMINDER

As we stop and reflect on the controversial subject of modest clothing, there are a couple of things we need to be reminded of. Remember, the bible is our standard (see 1Tim 3:16-17; 2Pet 1:3). The standard that establishes what is acceptable and not acceptable for all Christian behavior is the word of God. This includes clothing and what we wear. The word of God is the standard for what is acceptable to wear and what is not acceptable to wear.

As we reflect upon the controversial and emotional nature of this topic, we understand that there will be disagreements and debate. The point is, the disagreements and debate need to center around our application of bible teachings and principles. The disagreement cannot surround my preferences compared to your preferences, or my likes and dislikes compared to your likes and dislikes. The standard for acceptable modest clothing is not set by me, it is not set by you, it is not set by fashion, it is not set by feelings; the standard is set by the word of God. When the discussion or debate on the topic of modest clothing walks down a path that has a blatant disregard for God's word, or a misuse of God's word, is when we walk down the wrong road. We need reminded that this topic needs to be less about you and I's preferences and more about what God's word teaches. If we disagree on this subject, this is something we can work through. But when the disagreement has little to do with the word of God resolution will be a near impossibility. The bible is our standard for all things, including that of modest clothing.

### CONCLUSION

Don't forget our stated goal; to evaluate and define the boundaries of modesty to ultimately promote more productive discussion on modest clothing. This is a controversial, emotional, and challenging, topic but it is not trivial.

Consider the following quote from Jeff Pollard, "God covered man in the Garden; it appears that Satan (and his host) have been trying to strip him ever since. And quite successfully (p.34)." Brethren, it is the responsibility of God's people to uphold God's standard of modesty! This will only happen when we go back to defining the boundaries, understanding the principles, and opening up dialogue to find common ground to build and work from.