

I Timothy 2.9

Sermon Notes by Pastor Paul Goh

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Beloved, this text begins with the words, “in like manner also”. What does this mean? Firstly, it means that the apostle is continuing his instruction to Pastor Timothy concerning the public worship of God. I Timothy is a pastoral epistle and therefore the apostle is giving instruction to Timothy as to how he ought to behave himself in the house of God, which is the theme of I Timothy. In the first few verses of chapter 2, he instructed Pastor Timothy how he ought to pray in the congregation: that he has to pray for all kinds of men, for kings, those in authority so that they may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is the will of God not for each and every man to be saved but for all kinds of men to be saved. Secondly, even as the apostle wills that men pray everywhere, so it is the will of the apostle that women adorn themselves with modest apparel.

Is the matter of dressing modestly in the public worship of God an important matter to God? Yes it is, firstly, otherwise, the apostle of God would not have addressed the man of God, Pastor Timothy of Ephesus in this epistle. There are clear instructions from God’s Word, not only from our text but also in I Peter 3 and Isaiah 3. Is it a matter of Christian liberty, as many would say? Would you say that this is a matter of Christian liberty when Scripture instructs us to do so? Surely not. We are obliged to obey God’s Word concerning dressing modestly in the house of God. Secondly, when we come to the house of God, whom are we worshipping? We are appearing before Jehovah, the almighty God. He is the God of our salvation. And thus, we are to be spiritually prepared and have the right attitudes when we come to worship him. To be dressed modestly, after all, is about the heart attitude. And when our heart is right, it will be manifested in our dress. If our heart attitude is evil, then our dress will be sloppy, casual and irreverent. But, if our attitude is right, then our dress will honour God. But does that mean that what we wear to church is unimportant and we can wear whatever we want since it is a matter of the heart? No, the outward is always the fruit of the inward and thus, what we wear is also very important.

The theme is Dressing Modestly.

First, we consider the meaning. Secondly, the right heart attitude and thirdly, the wrong ornaments

The meaning.

What is modesty? According to the American Dictionary of the English language, 1828, which is reported to contain the greatest number of bible definitions state, modesty refers quote “to that lowly temper which accompanies a moderate estimate of one’s own worth and importance. And in the female, the word is used synonymously with chastity, or purity of manners. In this instance, modesty results from purity of mind, or from the fear of disgrace and ignominy (deserving or causing public disgrace or shame) fortified by education and principle. Unaffected modesty is the sweetest charm of female excellence, the richest gem in the diadem of honour” end of quote. This means that modesty is the opposite of boldness or arrogance. It does not draw attention to itself or to show off in an unseemly way. Chastity means moral purity in thought and conduct. Moral purity does not exhibit sensuality and ostentation. That is modesty. The calling of the Christian women is to adorn in modest apparel. To adorn means to put in order, to arrange in order to have an attractive appearance and women are to adorn to have an orderly appearance.

The principle of dressing modestly proceeds from keeping the 7th commandment in our hearts, which says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery”. And according to the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith, A138. The duties required in the seventh commandment are, chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior; and the preservation of it in ourselves and others; watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses: temperance, keeping of chaste company, modesty in apparel; marriage by those have not the gift of continency, conjugal love, and cohabitation; diligent labour in our callings; shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto. In short, the 7th commandment requires the preservation of our own and our neighbour’s chastity, in heart, speech and behavior. And includes watching our eyes and our sense and the keeping of godly company. And our own Heidelberg Catechism in QA108. The seventh commandment teaches us that all unchastity is accursed of God, and that we should therefore loathe it with our whole hearts, and live chastely and modestly, whether in holy wedlock or single life. QA109, What does God forbid more in this commandment than adultery and such gross sins. Answer: since both our body and soul are temples of the holy ghost, it is his will that we keep both pure and holy, therefore, he forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever may entice thereto. And therefore, from the teaching of the Presbyterian and Reformed Catechisms, immodest dress proceeds from the attitudes of the heart of holiness. And we can see the apostle in the words of our text now proceeds to the attitude of the heart which is absolute necessary for modest dressing. Or in his explanation of the meaning of modest dressing, he is moving from the external dress to the internal – the attitude of the heart. The two cannot be divorced. The external proceeds from the internal and the external is a reflection of the internal.

The right heart attitude is shamefacedness.

This refers to a state of mind or attitude that is necessary for one to be modest and thus to dress modestly. It is a moral feeling, reverence, awe, and respect for the feelings or opinion of others. Shamefacedness is also for one own’s conscience that there is a sense of self – respect and honour. It is also the unwillingness to trespass the boundaries of propriety. This means that shamefacedness knows the boundaries and the desire to stay within that boundary and does not the desire to show off. Example of a couple who had a sense of shame is Adam and Eve. After Adam and Eve took of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, their eyes were opened and what did they realise? They realised that they were naked! “Oh no. We must find something to cover our nakedness”. And they plucked fig leaves from the tree and sewed them together and made aprons. They did that because they were ashamed of their nakedness, which was a result of their sin. Sin causes shame. And so, we as children of Adam, who have inherited the sin of Adam and Eve, will also experience a sense of shame unless we cover up. The nakedness of Adam and Eve was good before they fell into sin because God made them that way. They did not feel ashamed of it. But when they took of the forbidden fruit, they were ashamed of their nakedness but their covering which was waist down were insufficient. And so, God made them coats of skin to over them. This covering is significant in two ways. First, they were covered by coats of skin (Gen. 3.21). Those skins belonged to the sheep, which was slain to provide a coat for Adam and Eve. That slain sheep is the type of the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus Christ who died for the sins of his people. He is the promised Messiah of Genesis 3.15 who will come to save his people from their sins and will inflict the ultimate defeat of the devil on the cross. At the cross, Christ provided a covering for Adam and Eve. And that covering is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. And with that righteousness, Adam and Eve will be clothed in God’s sight. Secondly, that coat of skin refers to a tunic or an

undergarment or it can refer to a long shirt-like garment. This is an ordinary garment with long sleeves, and extended down to the ankles when worn as a dress. The important thing is that this was God's design for covering Adam and Eve's nakedness and shame. Does God provide us clothing for His people? Or are we to dress whatever we like? No, God commands us to dress modestly with shamefacedness.

And thus, it belongs to the Christian women who are shamefaced to cover up their bodies with clothing. The opposite of shamefaced would be to expose themselves in a shameful way: thighs, buttocks, cleavages are exposed. And wearing too tight clothing that highlights the curves of the body. In fact, the more subtle is not stark nakedness but clothing that is suggestive on what is beneath that clothing. e.g. Exposed tops, or unbuttoned blouses, or spaghetti stripes. Included are skimpy skirts or wearing as little as possible. The positive teaching would be to wear clothes that cover up your bodies in a decent way. Cover up so that you do not cause your brothers to fall into sin. This is not a joking matter – brothers are easily distracted by a beautiful figure that is sinfully exposed and that disrupts their focus on the worship of God. I would not ask the brothers or sisters how many times they were distracted in a wrong way in the worship service of God. Ladies and mothers, you sin against God and you sin against your brother if you cause them to stumble in sin with regard to dress.

The second right heart attitude is sobriety.

Generally, it refers to good judgment, moderation, self – control, decency. Sobriety is a command over the bodily passions, a self-mastery in the area of appetite. It is the habitual inner government of the passions and desire. In effect, what the apostle is saying is that when such attitude of sobriety is present, it will be evident in her modest dress. She would not draw attention to herself – using her beauty or charm or say by her dress, “have you noticed me out” or “I am available”. This inner attitude of sobriety is missing in bars and pubs, where all self-control is lost through alcoholic drink and in drinking themselves drunk. Pubs are not a place for Christians and clubbing is not an activity for Christians. Thus, the heart of the issue of modesty is not dress but the issue of the heart. And if the heart is right with God with all purity, you will dress modestly.

But, the Christian women are not to put on braided hair or gold, or pearls or expensive clothing. The fashion of that day is braided hair. This is hair that is twined, twisted and piled up high and secured by a hairpin which is made of sea –shell. Their hair may be ornamented with pearls or some gold dust sprinkled on it so that the hair will look sparkling. And they were also wearing expensive clothing of gold and purple. You can imagine that by this hairdo, they were attracting all kinds of attention in the church. Instead of worshipping God, worshippers will be admiring the fabulous hairdo and the hairdo was also obstructing the view of the worshippers. What does the apostle mention this? What is his point? The apostle is describing the dress of the prostitutes, whose purpose is to grab attention from men or other women. And so they wore the most eye-catching garments with gold and pearls. Those clothing are also the latest fashion.

Therefore, the ladies of the congregation ought not be wearing those dazzling clothing when they come for worship, for these clothing draw attention to itself and therefore are not fitting for the dress of godly women. You must not misunderstand the apostle: he is not saying that you are to find the drabest or grey clothing that you can find. The most boring clothing too can attract undue attention especially when it is odd and queer. You ought not to be wearing those eye-popping

designs that evoke gasps and wows. There is one thing that you must know about dresses. The latest fashion oftentimes is not for the Christian. The world does not design dresses with modesty in mind or with the inner attitude of shamefacedness or sobriety. Their definition of beauty is radically different from God's perspective. To the fashion house of the world, like Milan, Paris or New York, what is beautiful is sexual. And so they design clothes to make women sexy. You would not want to look sexy because then you would attract the wrong kind of attention and you would regret it for the rest of your life. God's standard of beauty is not outward but inward. Read I Peter 3.1-6. What is true beauty according to God? It is beauty from the heart, the ornament of the meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God of great price. Sarah subjected herself to her Abraham, her husband, calling him Lord. Therefore, the beauty of modesty is not old fashioned, but the true beauty according to God's Word. How are you dressed? Are you dressed modestly or immodestly? Are your hemlines getting low and lower and more flesh is being exposed, front and back? Do you acknowledge that it is wrong to dress immodestly? Are you dressed immodestly because you have been fed by a steady diet of the latest fashion and values from Hollywood through the movies and television so that you cannot see that it is wrong to dress immodestly? Can you make the right judgment of what is modest and immodest dressing? Or have we become spiritually numb by being bombarded by all the erotic images: mini skirts, mini shorts, skimpy tops, women in sexy poses so that we no longer are able to make a righteous judgement about these things. If this is so, then, let us confess our sins and return unto the Lord. Seek the forgiveness that is in Christ Jesus, who stands ready to forgive us and cleanse us from all our sins. Amen