

# A Theology of Clothing

## Genesis 2-3; 1 Peter 3:1-6

THRIVE! Growing and Changing in the Christian Life

Prepared by: Matthew S. Black

Sunday, February 14, 2016, 10:30am at Living Hope Church of Roselle, Illinois  
[livinghopechurch.net](http://livinghopechurch.net)

“Clothes are not meant to make people think about what is under them. Clothes are meant to direct attention to what is not under them: Arms and hands that serve others in the name of Christ, ‘beautiful’ feet that carry the gospel to where it is needed, and the brightness of a face that has beheld the glory of Jesus.”

– John Piper

### Announcements

1. Welcome to visitors / welcome packet
2. Sunday School Marriage Enrichment Class in the Spring, sign up if you are interested
3. Be sure to plan on staying for our Winter Fellowship Dinner immediately after the service this morning. We have plenty of food, and we are inviting you to be our guest!

*If* you don't have a Bible, there should be one in the seat in front of you. Open your Bible to **1 Timothy 2**. The title of our message this morning is “Growing in Modesty.”<sup>1</sup>

### The Importance of Clothing

Clothing is important. If a man goes to battle without his armor and weapons, he will die. What you wear presents a message to the world. It speaks of your faith and who you are.

### Give the Right Opinion of Christ by our Modesty

We as Christians are to be “clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ.” We are to “glorify the Lord and to enjoy Him forever.” To glorify in the language Jesus spoke, means to “give the right opinion” of someone or something. We are to give the right opinion of Jesus in who we are, in what we do, and in what we choose to wear.

### The Lord is Clothed

**Psalm 93:1**, “The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty; The LORD has clothed and girded Himself with strength; Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Much of this teaching is adapted from Dr. David Gunderson, a professor at Southern Seminary in Louisville and his talk on *A Heart-Driven Modesty: God and Clothing*.

The Lord is clothed with majesty and glory! We see that our modesty and our clothing is really a part of our worship to God. We ought to present ourselves in every way as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Modesty is a Worship Issue**

When we consider clothing, what we wear and how we present ourselves in this world, according to St. Paul the apostle, modesty is a worship issue. What we wear and how we present ourselves to the world really shows where our loyalties lie.

“Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart,” this is true. But it is also true the **fruit** of your life reveals your **heart**, and that includes what you wear. “By their fruits you shall know them,” Jesus said.

*What we wear was never intended to draw attention to ourselves, but to bring glory and honor and attention to our God.*

### **Piper Quote**

John Piper said it this way: “Clothes are **not** meant to make people think about what is under them. Clothes are meant to direct attention to what is not under them: Arms and hands that serve others in the name of Christ, ‘beautiful’ feet that carry the gospel to where it is needed, and the brightness of a face that has beheld the glory of Jesus.”

### **A Theology of Clothing**

We are called to cover our bodies because of sin and shame. We need a covering. Jesus came to ultimately give us that covering in His blood. But we are going to see that from the beginning, God has a theology of clothing. Clothing means something.

We were originally called to draw attention to God in innocence in the garden. We were made in God’s image, called to reflect His honor and person in our lives. But when sin came, all that changed. So would you turn to Genesis 1 as we look back to the beginning?

This morning, I want to offer you several exhortations toward modesty. The first is found in Genesis 1.

## **I. See our desperate Need for Modesty, Gen. 2:25; 3:6-11, 21.**

### **In the Beginning**

Turn if you would to the opening words of your Bible in Genesis 1. In the beginning, “God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Everything God created was “very good.” All were in peace and harmony. Man and wife were naked without shame. God created a sinless, guiltless, shameless world of beauty. Can you imagine a world without sin and shame? Everything on earth was perfectly good in the Garden Temple of Eden. and we see in **Genesis 2:25** that “[Adam] and [Eve] were both naked and were not ashamed.” In their innocence they displayed the glory and honor of God in all that they did.

**Righteousness reigned on the earth.** There was no lust or lasciviousness. Earth’s inhabitants were innocent and pure. They were naked and perfectly modest. They had no sin to be covered.

**But it didn’t last.** “So when the woman saw that the [forbidden] tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she

took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked [immodest]. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths” (Genesis 3:6-7).

### **The Need for a Covering**

Sin produced guilt. Guilt produced shame. Shame requires a covering. Before sin entered the world, there was no guilt. Because there was no guilt, there was no shame. Because there was no shame, there was no need for a covering. Oh, how sin has changed our world!

### **The Shame of Nakedness/Immodesty**

We continue reading in **Genesis 3:8-11**, “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked [I was immodest], and I hid myself.’ He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’”

God says, no doubt with a deep sadness in His heart, “You’re not supposed to know that you’re naked... You’re not supposed to feel shame! You have sinned...”

God was not in doubt with any of these questions. The Lord was holding Adam accountable. God holds all of us accountable.

### **Fashion, “The Ever-Changing Clothing Rack of the Guilty”**

One of the clearest evidences of our complete fallenness is that each and every one of us in this room is covered. We are guilty and we need a covering for that shame! Dr. David Gunderson, a professor at Southern Seminary in Louisville, said it this way; “There is a sense in which fashion is simply the *ever-changing clothing rack of the guilty*. It is our attempt to recreate the beauty of God’s original creation and to hide our own shame.”

### **The Lord, the First Clothing Maker**

Adam and Eve had been innocent: naked and unashamed. But when sin entered into the world, shame followed. Their nakedness was now immodest for the first time because of sin and guilt. Their sin was systemic. Their hearts became “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9).

The Lord is the maker of the first clothing. We read in Genesis 3:21, “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.”

### **We’ve Turned Our Identities Upside-Down**

Sin has marred the image of God in us, and we need to be covered. When a person dies and begins to decay, we cover their body. So it is with mankind. We have entered into moral decay, and we need a covering.

Sin marred our identity and purpose on the earth.

- Men and women were created to be **mirrors** of God’s glory, but we turned ourselves into **magnets** for the attraction of others.
- God made us to **reflect** His glory, but we wake up in the morning geared to **attract** glory for ourselves.

### God's Image Marred

Men and women are to be faithful in marriage. Women are to support their husbands and raise their families. Men are to provide for and protect women.

The fall has changed turned the order of creation and the use of marriage upside down. Women lure and charm men, to their ruin. Men dominate and molest women, to their harm. Men are enticed and seduced. Women are abused and degraded. Immodesty has infected our culture at every level. People celebrate their shame! Instead of men protecting women from the lewd display of their bodies, which should be for their husbands alone, wicked men permeate our culture who celebrate the worst sins of lust from Sodom and Gomorrah.

We as Christian men should stand against this tide by protecting our wives and teaching our daughters what true Christian modesty is, and by teaching our sons to protect and honor women.

### The Tide of Sin

Sadly, this is not happening. Our feminine heroes are named Madonna and Jolie and Gaga instead of Carmichael and Edwards and Elliot. Fifty-year-old women have surgeries to look twenty-five. Fifty-year-old men run off with twenty-five-year-old secretaries.

Fifteen-year-olds binge and purge and cut. The pornography industry runs away with America's men and America's soul. And it has infected our churches.

Godly Christian girls spend days trying to find modest clothes to wear while godly Christian guys fight minute-by-minute against a cultural onslaught of sexual enticement.

### Covered in Christ

We need modesty. The core of modesty is that we are covered in Christ! He is our sin bearer. He takes away our sin and shame. We are covered in the blood of Jesus. And we want to preach that with our **character** and **life** and **demeanor** and even with our **clothing**.

Puritan George Swinnock described the clothing of innocence that man forfeited when he surrendered that clothing through his own sin – “Innocence at first was man's comely robe, in comparison of which the richest clothes are but nasty rags. Ah, how lovely did the first man and woman look in that heaven-spun attire! In his original splendor, the most beautiful and costly apparel would have been but as a cloud over the face of the sun, or a coarse curtain over a beautiful picture. But sin caused shame, and shame called for clothes to cover it.”<sup>2</sup>

That brings us to our second point. We ought to reject the world's celebration of immodesty and embrace biblical modesty.

## II. Embrace the Biblical **Principles** for Modesty, 1 Peter 3:1-6.

### St. Peter's Appeal for Modesty – An Evangelism Tool!

Peter essentially says that a woman's modesty is an evangelistic tool. It so powerfully reflects the Gospel, that an unsaved husband can be persuaded of the Gospel's truthfulness by his believing wife's modest spirit and clothing. This perhaps is shocking to us who live in a culture that marginalizes modesty as reserved only for backwards people. But no, the Lord says, this is

---

<sup>2</sup> George Swinnock, *Works*, v. 1.

not only a worship issue, it's an evangelism issue. A modest spirit and a clothing that adorns a meek and quiet spirit is a powerful witness to the power of the Gospel.

**1 Peter 3:1-6**, "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 3 Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. 5 For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening."

## SIX Principles of Modest Attire

I want to give you six biblical principles from this passage that help us practice modesty.

### (1) Modesty shies away from drawing attention to the external (1Pet. 3:3)

1 Pet. 3:3, "Do not let your adorning be external — the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing...").

**Peter is not saying that women should neglect their appearance.** Notice that he includes "the putting on of clothing" in his prohibition. This would mean he's saying that you can't wear clothes at all, which would be somewhat antithetical to the call to modesty! No, Peter is saying, "*Don't let clothing and shoes and fashions and accessories and styles be your focus and your obsession.*" He's saying, "Don't be extravagant and ostentatious and attention-seeking." He's saying, "Do not let your adorning — what makes you beautiful — be external."

**Scripture does not speak against the presence of beauty**, the enhancement of beauty, or our attraction to beauty. God made us male and female, and He has designed us to be physically attracted to the opposite sex. He also designed women with the desire and the gifting to make things beautiful. Men destroy things. Women make them beautiful. Bachelor pads aren't usually warm and inviting. In fact, the main difference between a bachelor pad and a prison cell is the bars. Men can enjoy beauty, but we don't usually cultivate it.

**The patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) all married beautiful women** (Gen 12:11-15; 25:16; 26:7; 29:16-18, 28). The excellent wife in **Proverbs 31** dresses herself and her family in vibrant and quality clothing (31:21-22), and she produces and sells fine, valuable garments (31:24). The **bride in Song of Solomon** is clearly beautiful in form, appearance, and dress.

In all of these cases, the godly women of the Bible weren't characterized by their ostentatious clothing, but by their audacious faith!

Scripture also says, "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is fading, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (Proverbs 31:30). Outward beauty is ultimately empty and promised to fade. Therefore, the modest woman shies away from distracting, enticing, eye-catching extravagance. Peter is not talking about exposing skin but drawing attention.

## (2) Modesty highlights internal character (1Pet. 3:4)

**1 Pet. 3:4**, “but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit...”

Paul says something very strange in verse 4. He says that “your adorning” — what makes you beautiful — should be invisible. It is a “hidden” beauty, a quiet attractiveness, a gentle loveliness. It is a beauty of the heart. And no matter how many times you’ve heard it, or how cliché it may seem, we need Peter to tell us again: “True beauty begins and centers in the heart.”

The most foundational article of clothing in a godly woman’s wardrobe is her character. The soft tones of a “gentle and quiet spirit.” The perfectly-crafted fabric of a tranquil soul. A well-earned reputation for good works.

## (3) Modesty never goes out of style (1Pet. 3:4)

**1 Pet. 3:4**, “but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit...”

**Clothing** wears out. Everyone look down at what you’re wearing. How old are the clothes you have on? How many of you are wearing clothes that you have personally owned for more than ten years? **Clothing** wears out.

**People** wear out. How many 70-year-old models have you seen on TV recently? How many 80-year-old athletes have you seen running around lately? **People** wear out.

### People Will Honor You, Not Lust After You

But if you have a heart for God that reflects your submission to His Kingdom and His Lordship through a meek and quiet spirit, that never goes out of style. It’s attractive in the right way. People will honor you, not lust after you.

### Old Clothing Fashions

Why do we have sayings like, “That’s so ’80’s” or “retro” or “blast from the past”? Because the hot new styles of today are the bellbottoms of tomorrow. Fashions change.

### Wedding Photos

For those of you who have been married for 15 or 20 years or more, your wedding pictures may be many things — beautiful, precious, memorable — but they are not in style. This is why the older (and wiser) generation often doesn’t care much about style. They have seen it come and go. They understand that fashion is more of a tide than an ocean. It is ever changing, never fixed. Play it cool in 1970 and you will look the fool in 1990 or 2010.

### Resist Passing Fashions

So should the transitory nature of clothing, appearance, and fashions discourage and dishearten us? Should we be obsessed with anti-aging remedies and keeping up with current styles? No. The suffering Apostle Paul writes, “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). Our bodies are fading, our clothes are fading, but modesty of heart and soul never fades; it never goes out of style.

## **Modesty Never Goes Out of Style**

The “imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” never goes out of style! The internal character produced by the Holy Spirit and molded throughout life is “imperishable.” This is beauty that does not fade, and cannot be taken — not by physical illness, not by fashion trends, not by cultural shifts; not even by death itself. Do you want permanent, enduring, invincible, constantly-improving beauty? Make investments in your character. Invest in modesty.

### **(4) Modesty is precious in God’s sight (v. 4)**

**1 Pet. 3:4**, “but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which in God’s sight is very precious.”

#### **Guess Jeans**

When I was a kid, I remember saving up money to buy Guess jeans or Caverittis or Girbaud jeans. Back in the 80s I remember paying \$50 for a pair of jeans. That’s a tragedy. But it’s what I thought was valuable and precious. As students, we were judged harshly by other students unless we wore what was in fashion. As a kid shoes were valued. They had to be K-Swiss or Reebok. Sadly, our values were misplaced. These temporary fashions were “precious” to us as kids. We were misguided!

The Bible tells us that God values modesty. To our Lord, a woman with a meek and quiet spirit is “in His sight, very precious” (vs. 4).

In the Bible this word “precious” refers to expensive perfume (Mark 14:3) or costly, luxurious garments (**1 Tim 2:9**). The women who lives with a God-saturated, Christ-imitating, gospel-transformed, Spirit-produced godliness is a treasure to her Father.

#### **Jill’s Meek and Quiet Spirit**

I can remember when I courted Jill. Yes I was attracted to her physically, but I couldn’t dwell on that. She was too precious. She had something that clothing couldn’t buy. She had and has to this day a meek and quiet spirit. That’s something that is precious and costly.

Ladies, you are precious to your Father when you live and dress modestly, with a gentle and quiet spirit, with a heart for service, with your soul fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **Attracting the Right Kind of Man**

A modest spirit in a woman will attract the right kind of man. The humble, gentle, tranquil woman of character is precious not only to God but also to God’s men! The woman who dresses appropriately and thoughtfully and with self-control is very attractive to God’s sons. Ladies, ask yourselves: Who am I trying to attract? Whose attention do I hope to catch?

#### **Immodesty Attracts Unfaithful Men**

Immodesty is guaranteed to attract the attention of men, but not faithful men. Immodesty attracts unfaithful men. Undignified men. Unholy men who love the lusts of this world. Immodesty attracts men that you do NOT want your daughters to marry. If a man is enjoying your immodesty or your daughter’s immodesty, he is also enjoying every other woman’s.

Seek the kind of precious and valuable character that God cherishes.

## (5) Modesty has a noble heritage (1Pet. 3:5-6)

1 Pet. 3:5-6, “For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”

### You are Daughters of Sarah

Notice how Peter attempts to inspire and motivate these Christian women. He asks, “Do you want to stand in the long line of honorable, heroic, praiseworthy, God-exalting women?” Modesty has a noble heritage: “this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves...” They adorned themselves in faith, not in fear.

These godly women were not afraid of being rejected by this world. They walked by faith and were clothed in submission and modesty.

The attitude and the apparel of the godly woman have been passed down to you. Preserve Sarah’s legacy with your modesty. Act like the daughters of Sarah that you are!

I would encourage you to read Christian biographies about noble women of the faith. One thing you’ll notice: they weren’t known for the size of their closets or the popularity of their styles. They were known for adorning themselves with “good works” as Paul urges (1 Tim 2:10).

### Holy Women Who Represented Another Kingdom

What characterized these women? They were “holy women.” They were women who represented the Kingdom of God and Christ. They were pilgrims and strangers in this world. They were women not caught up in the slavery of trendiness, but instead they were unattached to the world.

Separation from the world’s value’s has a profound effect on a believer’s life. Dress is just one of them. The way a woman dresses is a **declaration of allegiance**. To whom have you pledged your life? When you dress yourself in the morning, you are wrapping yourself in a flag. You are representing a kingdom.

Do you look just like Sodom’s culture, or is your attitude, your behavior, and your wardrobe distinct? This doesn’t mean that you are deliberately dowdy – that is also immodest as it draws attention to yourself in a different way.

But hear this: modest and respectable clothing is always in style. **Be classy and choose a modest style that portrays the excellence and beauty of God.**

### The Brought Attention to God

They were “holy women who hoped in God.” Do you bring attention to God with your meek and quiet spirit ladies? Women are naturally designed to hope and desire and anticipate. Peter is speaking to Christian women with unbelieving husbands, so their husbands likely do not provide them with the kind of security and love and leadership and attention that they might desire. Nevertheless, they set their hope on God. Modesty hopes in the love and pleasure and provision of God, not the love and pleasure and provision of men. Ask yourself when you dress, “What am I hoping for?”



## (6) Modesty has Gospel power (1Pet. 3:1-2, Isa. 61:10)

**1 Pet. 3:1-2**, “won without a word by the conduct of their wives.” Obviously Peter is talking about an godly wife and her unsaved husband, but this can be applied to the entire body of Christ.

Men and ladies, you are your brother’s keeper. You are going to give an account for helping your brothers and sisters grow in Christ or if you cause them to stumble.

### Arthur Pink Quote

I like how A. W. Pink put it in the 1930s and 40s. “If lustful looking be so grievous a sin, then those who dress and expose themselves with desires to be looked at and lusted after are not less, but even more guilty. In this matter it is only too often the case that men sin, but it is also true that women tempt them so to do. How great, then, must be the guilt of the great majority of the modern misses who deliberately seek to arouse the sexual passions of our young men. And how much greater still is the guilt of most of their mothers for allowing them to become lascivious temptresses.”

### An “Eloquent Silence”

Before the Gospel is preached, it has to be worn in our spirits. Bible scholars have described this attitude as an “eloquent silence”.<sup>3</sup>

Part of the power of the Gospel is its ability to transform a wild heart. So this eloquent silence cannot be manufactured with “cookie cutter Christianity” or a strategy for skirt length. This kind of modesty comes from the heart of men and women who “clothe themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Peter is saying that external modesty is fueled by the inner modesty of the heart. And truly, Peter is saying that Christian modesty is an evangelistic strategy. Our modesty helps fulfill the Great Commission!

It shows which Kingdom we are from! Are we clothed in the garb of Sodom, or in the garments of salvation?

Has God clothed you this morning? **Isaiah 61:10**, “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”

### The Quiet Power of Modesty

There is a quiet power of modesty that advances the Gospel. Do you have a heart for the lost? Do you want to see people saved? Do you want to see the gospel advance? Then wrap yourself in the Gospel. Clothe yourself with the garments of salvation. Then live and dress modestly!

Modest character has a quiet power. It is so attractive and persuasive and winsome in a dark, desperate, competitive, self-conscious, attention-seeking world like ours. The women of the world dress so that men will see through their clothing. The women of God dress so that men will see past their clothing to their transformed character. Modesty has evangelistic power.

---

<sup>3</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 128.

**We are in a War**

We are in a war! What side are you on? Whose uniform are you wearing? Are you wearing the garb of a meek and quiet spirit of submission to the Lordship of Jesus, or are you flaunting the shame and rebellion of the world? James said that we if we are “a friend of the world” then we are acting like “God’s enemies” (**Jms. 4:4**).

**Conclusion**

My ultimate need is not more clothing or better clothing. My ultimate need is not even a gentle and quiet spirit or a life of good works or a God-honoring wardrobe. I need righteousness. The ultimate solution for immodesty is the gospel.

**Psalm 32:1** — “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”

The righteousness of Christ has covered us, and we are now to dress as those who desire to make people notice that righteousness. We want people to see that God has clothed us, not that the GAP has clothed us or that Hollister has clothed us or that Calvin Klein has clothed us or that J. Crew has clothed us. We are wearing Christ. Let it be known.

Christ was clothed with a mocking purple robe and a crown of thorns so that I might wear His righteousness (Mark 15:17). And Christ was undressed and uncovered and exposed on the cross so that my sin and my shame might be covered (Luke 23:34).

**Jesus Dressed in Wickedness so I could be Covered in Righteousness**

God dresses His Son in my wickedness so that I might be dressed in His righteousness. God stripped His Son of His glory so that I might be brought into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Christ paid in blood for my clothing. Hallelujah what a Savior!