

Validating the Gospel in Femininity

Femininity

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 11:1-15; Deuteronomy 22:5
Preached on: Sunday, March 23, 2008

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The following message was delivered on Sunday morning, March 23, 2008, in the Adult Sunday School class at Trinity Baptist Church in Montville, NJ.

Now it was four weeks ago that I conducted this class and presented what I called "A Pastoral Appeal for Decided Modesty of Dress in the House of God," and I must say it's been a great encouragement to me to have the feedback from a number of you, particularly women, indicating your appreciation for both the spirit and the substance in which the subject was dealt with. At the conclusion of that appeal that I gave on behalf of your other elders as well, I stated that I hoped also to make a second appeal on that occasion, namely "An Appeal for Distinctive Femininity of Dress in the House of God." However, since time did not allow for that second subject to be addressed, I promised that it would be addressed in the near future. Well, the near future is now. With Pastor Smith in Pakistan and I'll give a little report of the telephone conversation I had with him just minutes before getting in the car to leave and come here this morning, this slot was open and it seemed to be the part of wisdom that I should take it, and so my subject this morning is "A Pastoral Appeal to the Women and Girls of this Congregation Concerning Distinctive Femininity of Dress in the House of God."

Now as I take up this theme, I want to repeat something that I said when I introduced the study on modesty in the house of God, and it is this: as surely as your pastors are confident that there are no women in the membership of Trinity church who are deliberately seeking to seduce men by their dress or willfully seeking to provoke men to lust after their bodies, so we are equally persuaded that there are no female members of this assembly who are consciously and defiantly determined to obliterate male and female distinctions by the manner of their dress when they appear in the house of God. Now I don't know how to state it more plainly. We do not believe that sitting here in this place this morning within the membership, there may be some outside the membership, but within the membership who are consciously and defiantly determined to obliterate male and female distinctions by the manner of their dress when they appear in the house of God. Rather it is our persuasion as your pastors that as our society or what we might call American culture, has and is consciously and defiantly attempting to obliterate distinctive God-ordained male and female roles, responsibilities, and relationships, we believe that

an unconscious, uncritical, undiscerning conformity to this cultural climate has eroded some of the clear male and female distinctions which in past times have marked us as a congregation. And because you and I are called to a God-pleasing life in non-conformity to the world around us, Romans 12:2, we, as your pastors, believe we must address this issue. And as we do, we are once again in the foundational area of concern, namely that our life together as the people of God would both validate and illustrate the power of the gospel and the truth of the gospel.

1 Timothy 3:15 when Paul gives specific directions to Timothy to implement in the church at Ephesus, one of them was the matter of modesty because Paul says the church in its identity is both pillar and ground of the truth. The church has a responsibility to embrace and confess the truth as objectively revealed in the word. God's people are to intellectually grasp and speak forth their unashamed conviction about the truth, but further Paul was concerned that the truth be experientially embraced and embodied in the life of the people of God so when he addressed such practical matters as the modesty of women's dress in chapter 2, verses 9 to 11, he roots it obviously in the great issues of a woman's place under God and how that should be exemplified in the life of the church of God.

So this morning with that as our concern, I'm going to lay out as time permits the truth that is, I believe it is the truth of God, in three categories. First, the biblical basis for this appeal for distinctive femininity. Secondly, a specific application of this biblical basis. And then thirdly, some concluding issues regarding distinctive femininity in the house of God. And once again, I ask you to bear with me that my eye contact will be limited. I want to be as precise as possible. There's an awful lot of whiteout stuff on my pages of my final notes where I've changed a word here or there or a phrase in order to be more accurate, and also in the interest of time.

First of all, then, what is the biblical basis for your pastors making an appeal for distinctive femininity of dress in the house of God? Isn't that going off the charts of biblical direction? Well, we do not believe it is and so I ask you to turn with me to the watershed passage, 1 Corinthians 11. Paul begins in verse 2 by saying to the Corinthians, "Now I praise you that you remember me in all things, and hold fast the traditions, even as I delivered them to you." In other words, there were apostolic traditions, patterns of behavior that Paul and the other apostles imposed upon the churches, and there was uniformity in those patterns. That's why he concludes this passage in verse 16 by saying, "But if any man seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." And later on when he's dealing with the matter of the various gifts in the churches and dealing with male and female relationships and who should speak and who should not speak, verse 33b of chapter 14 he says, "As in all the churches of the saints, let the women keep silence in the churches." In other words, he begins this section in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 by letting the Corinthians know that by and large they were manifesting in their congregational life a conformity to the apostolic traditions that were delivered to all of the churches.

Verse 3, "But," there's a but. He's going to address an area in which they have begone to step outside the parameters of that apostolic tradition and it has to do primarily with this whole matter of a head covering. Whether the covering was a veil, whether the covering is a woman's hair is irrelevant to our studies this morning. The point is it was a practical matter of how women were appearing publicly in the gathering of God's people. That's the nub of the issue he's going to address. But now notice in addressing it, he doesn't plunge right into that practical, external, visible issue, he starts with the theology of divinely instituted hierarchy. Look at the passage, "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." In other words, he says, "What I'm going to address has profound theological roots. You women, you men at Corinth need to understand that if there is anything in your external bearing and appearance in the gathering of the people of God that in any way would cast a shadow over whether or not you understand divinely instituted hierarchal structures, I'm going to go after it." With all the issues that Paul could have addressed, Corinth, a city going to hell, drowning in its immorality and its idolatry, its pride of wisdom and of literature and of oratory, he takes half a chapter to deal with a head covering. Isn't that fiddling while Rome burns? Paul says no, it's preserving in the life of the church a confession by the appearance of men and women whether or not they're embracing from the heart divinely instituted hierarchal structure. I would have you to know.

Then he goes on to develop his subject. "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head," that is, he dishonors Christ. If in that culture he takes a posture in his external appearance that would indicate he is under submission to the women around him rather than directly in submission to Christ, he dishonors Christ. He dishonors the one who is his rightful head.

"But every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonors her head," that is, her husband, "for it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven." And the commentators write page after page what was the significance of a woman with a shaved head? And most of them agree whatever it was, it was dishonorable. Some say the temple prostitutes shaved their head and wore wigs, elaborate wigs, and that Paul is saying if you appear in the house of God without the culturally accepted symbols of your submission to men, you may as well appear like a harlot. That may well be what he's saying. I'm not dogmatizing, I'm just trying to briefly expound.

Verse 6, "For if a woman is not veiled, let her also be shorn: but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be veiled. For a man indeed ought not to have his head veiled, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man." Both man and woman were made in the image of God, as we'll see in the next hour, but in terms of the hierarchal structure, the man was the glory of God as leader and the woman is the glory of the man.

"For," and then he goes back into the order of creation, right back into Genesis 2, "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man: for neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man: for this cause ought the woman to have a sign of

authority on her head, because of the angels." And then the commentators write pages and pages what about the angels? Well, I don't know. Maybe what he's saying is they are present beholding your worship and they see your physical appearance in your worship. Don't forget the angels are looking, you women, you men. When you gather for worship and ministry, praying, prophesying in the house of God, make sure that your external appearance validates that men are glad to be men and nobly bear the burden of their headship, and you women appear in such a way that makes it evident you're declaring, "I'm glad to be a woman and I accept from the heart the tokens of my submission to male authority."

That's the nub of the passage and the principle that I want to extrapolate from that passage and I don't believe it is being forced at all, is that your physical appearance in the gathering of God's people on the one hand has profound theological significance and is important to God. Apostolic directives deal with it head-on. So I found this summary in one of my commentators. It's the less studied 1 Corinthians by a man named Jackman. He writes, "In appearing like a man, the woman seems to be moving toward usurpation of his role in worship and probably in many other areas as well. Similarly, for a man to appear as a woman with long hair is against the very nature of things or does not nature itself teach you, verse 14a, that is how things are normally just as it is normal for women to grow long hair for her hair is given to her for a covering, verse 15b. So what is a disgrace to man is her glory to a woman and Paul is not willing to countenance the upsetting of the natural order of things. Thus in most cultures, gender differences are established and indicated by differentiation in clothing and in appearance, especially in the hair. Refusal to accept these norms is usually an indication of difficulty in accepting gender differences or one's own gender definition."

And so from this passage, we see what I'm going to call the sensitivity that ought to be manifested among the people of God when they gather in the house of God. And what is it? Let me summarize it this way: distinctive culturally sensitive masculine and feminine external appearance in the household of God is an apostolic mandate. Let me give it to you again: distinctive culturally sensitive masculine and feminine external appearance in the house of God is an apostolic mandate. Half a chapter is given to dealing with that issue.

Then I want to take one text from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 22:5. In a section that if you have little summaries at the head of your Bible, those are not inspired, you will find something along this line: miscellaneous laws, sundry laws and regulations. Well, in the midst of Mosaic legislation, we find this directive. Deuteronomy 22:5. It's helpful if I get out of Numbers into Deuteronomy, then the text will pop up for me. "A woman shall not wear that which pertains to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whosoever does these things is an abomination unto the Lord your God." You say, "Pastor, surely as a responsible expositor of the word, you know better than to take one of these sundry laws out of the Mosaic civil legislation and in any way apply it to God's people under the new covenant." Well, don't be so quick to judge me as being an irresponsible expositor.

I want you to turn over to chapter 25 and verse 4. Track with me, please. Deuteronomy 25:4. "You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the grain." There you have a sundry law. When your ox has the yoke tied to him and I've seen them in Pakistan walking around in circles all day with blinders on and that's all he does, walks around all day. There in Pakistan he was turning a thing that ground up the sugar cane, or not ground it but squeezed it, but here they are treading the corn. You throw a bushel of corn on the floor and the poor ox all day long goes around in circles. He says, "Now don't muzzle the poor beast. When he's hungry, let him reach down and grab some of the corn that he's treading. Don't put a muzzle on him so the poor guy can't eat."

You say, "What's that say to us?" Well, turn to 1 Corinthians 9. In 1 Corinthians 9 where Paul is dealing with the subject of Christian liberty and says do not he and Barnabas have a right to live of the gospel but they forego that right for the sake of the gospel, he's proving that Christian workers have a right to live of the gospel and notice how he does that. He reasons, verse 6, "I and Barnabas, have we not a right to forbear working?" Now he goes to natural revelation. "What soldier ever served at his own charges? who plants a vineyard, and eats not the fruit thereof? or who feeds a flock, and eat not of the milk of the flock?" In other words he says, "Look out in the natural world. Everyone that labors in a given sphere whether soldier, whether farmer, dairy farmer, he is one who has a right to the fruit of his labor."

Verse 8, "Do I speak these things after the manner of men? or does not the law also say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the corn." Deuteronomy 25:4. Now notice what he says, "Is it for the oxen God cares, or did he say it assuredly for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written: because he that plows ought to plow in hope, and he that threshes, to thresh in hope of partaking." He says embedded in that directive, God intended an abiding moral principle that applies to us under the new covenant. I hope you see that.

And so in many parts of the Old Testament covenantal law administered by Moses, there are principles and we have a principle embodied in this directive that a man shall not wear that which pertains to a woman, or a woman to the man. And there's a lovely summary statement of what that means in another commentary that I have found very helpful. Raymond Brown, in "The Bible Speaks Today" series, he writes, "The extremely forceful language regarding inappropriate clothing for men and women, the Lord your God detests or it's an abomination who does this." It sounds strange to us but there are two likely reasons for this uncompromising prohibition. First, there was a serious moral issue at stake here. Sexual promiscuity was rife in Canaan and transvestite practices, you know what a transvestite is, that's a person who gets sexually excited or fulfilled by dressing in the garments of those of the opposite sex. Transvestite practices were all part of the corrupt and immoral context of the land Israel was about to inherit. This prohibition is a warning to the Hebrew people not to identify with the degrading sexual and homosexual practices of the Canaanites. The law does not simply relate to clothing but to any typical possessions normally worn or carried by the opposite sex. It emphasizes that gender distinctions are part of the created order and must not be obliterated.

So here is a principle that Almighty God is concerned that men dress distinctly as men and women dress distinctly as women and that, of course, has cultural parameters to it. I was thinking of our brethren in Pakistan. Both men and women wear the hamiz and the shalwars. That's the balloony top with the pantaloon bottom. However, the female hamiz and shalwars, as you'll see when our girls and ladies wear them, have distinctive fabric distinct from the men, have distinctive colors and print upon them, and the woman who wears them always has the veil shawl on her head coming down over her shoulders. So when a man and a woman 100 yards away both have hamiz and shalwars, you know immediately there's the man, there's the woman. The men's hamix and shalwars are very simple, they're never adorned with what we might call secondary needlework, they are always plain, khaki, light brown, gray whereas the women's are very colorful and distinctively feminine. So you see, this has cultural implications but whatever in any given culture is distinctly masculine and distinctly feminine, women are by their dress to say, "I'm glad I'm a woman. I glory in the badges of my femininity." And men are so to dress that they are saying, "I am a man and I glory in the badges of my masculinity." The God who made us male and female is displeased when the external signs and symbols of that distinction are exchanged in eternal appearance.

Now that's my basic biblical foundation for addressing you men, I'm sorry, you girls and you women with this pastoral entreaty concerning distinctively feminine dress in the gathering of God's people. So I move from the biblical basis rooted in 1 Corinthians 11 and Deuteronomy 22:5, secondly, a specific application of this biblical basis for our appeal for distinctive femininity of dress in the house of God.

Now to help you know where I'm going, let me tell you a true story. Five or six years ago, a single woman began to show up in our church. Her profession, her place of work was such that her professional wardrobe was all very dignified, distinctly feminine pantsuits. All of her jackets came down at least halfway over her hips and her buttocks. Her pants were very full cut. They did not hug her backside or her thighs or her crotch. And after being here for a couple of Lord's Days, she said, "Pastor, may I speak to you?" I said, "Certainly." She said, "I notice that I'm the only woman here with pants on. Is this going to be offensive to your people?" And I assured her because all of her pantsuits were very modest and had a distinctively feminine cut, you didn't have to look twice to know she was a woman, I saw no reason to tell her to go out and totally buy a new wardrobe. So I said to her, "No, our people will be comfortable with you. You come here to worship, not to parade yourself. Think no more about it."

Well, if she showed up now, she never would have asked the question. It's a fact. In the last year, there has been an exponential movement toward coming to the Lord's house on the Lord's Day in pants and in slacks. That's just a fact. I'm not saying I'm upset about it. I'm not getting angry. I'm not being nasty. But I've got eyes, okay? And if I were to ask you all to stand up right now, I'd say, "Pants. Pants. Slacks. Slacks. Pants. Pants. Slacks. Slacks. Dress." It's just a fact.

Now it's against the backdrop of that movement in our congregation that we as pastors have wrestled with this and said, "Well, since pants are taking over out there in our society and in our culture, should we regard this simply as a filtering into the church of an innocent matter of cultural evolution and just accept it?" Because there are some things that that's true. That's true of men's facial hair. Back in the '60s you showed up here with a beard, you were saying, "I'm with those pot smoking, go kill the government hippies." And I think we might have taken you aside and said, "Look, you've got liberty to grow a beard but you're making the statement in this cultural context that I don't think you want to make. Do you want to say to people, 'I've joined the pot smoking, dope taking crowd' in their opposition to all authority and government and Vietnam and all?" "No, no!" "Well, then get that beard off real quick, buddy, because that's what you're saying." But the evolution culturally is such that for men in business and places of authority, to wear a well-trimmed beard is just a good statement of masculinity. I love it when a guy that can grow a real beard grows a beard. As women don't grow beards, hallelujah! It's a distinctive mark of masculinity and you rejoice in it. Or mustaches like some others I look out and see. All right.

So where am I going with all of this? Well, this is where I'm going. Follow me carefully as I make a summarizing statement and then I issue my pastoral plea, all right? Here's the summarizing statement. It has two prongs to it. Track with me carefully now. Here's the first. It is no longer true that pants or slacks are a distinctively masculine item of clothing in our society. It is no longer true that pants or slacks are a distinctively masculine item of clothing in our society. There was a time when it was true. Where do you think the statement came from, "Hey, who wears the pants in that family?" How many have you ever heard that question? Okay, where did that come from? There was a time when pants belonged to men. They were a distinctively masculine item of clothing. So when you said, "Hey, who wears the pants," you were asking, "Who's running the show in that home?" Now if you asked the question, "Who wears the pants," you say everybody does and mostly jeans morning, noon and night, summer and winter. It is no longer true that pants or slacks are a distinctively masculine item of clothing in our society. However, now follow me closely, it is still true that dresses and skirts are a distinctively feminine article of clothing in our society. It is still true that dresses and skirts are distinctively feminine articles of clothing in our society. In spite of the tidal wave of the trend to egalitarian perspectives, unisex clothing, in spite of the growing cross-dressing fad, transvestite and homosexual, lesbian community with all of its aggressive demands, yet in our society men don't wear skirts and dresses.

Now do you agree with me about those two facts that I've just articulated? Pants are no longer a distinctive mark of masculinity but dresses and skirts are a distinctive mark of femininity. Do you all agree with me? If you don't, then I've lost my appeal. That's the basis of my appeal and I think if you're honest, you'll have to agree with me. How can you disagree with those two statements? They're facts of our society.

Now here's my pastoral plea or appeal. Based upon the biblical principles, 1 Corinthians 11, Deuteronomy 22:5, in the light of these two realities of what is and what is not distinctively a mark of femininity, here's the appeal: dear women and girls of this

assembly, since you have an opportunity by the way you dress to declare boldly that the gospel has made you in your heart a woman who loves modesty and femininity and all that goes with it, accepting male headship in the home, in the church, should you not desire to appear in the gathering of God's people attired with clothing that is decidedly modest and distinctively feminine? Should you not desire that opportunity by nothing you say with your mouth, just the way you appear, to say to any who look at you, to strangers who come among us, "I am a woman. I embrace my femininity. I revel in my femininity and all that is connected with it. Submission to male headship in the home, submission to male leadership in the church."

Dear ladies and girls, would you not desire that a stranger coming among us who knows nothing or little of what we believe, would see the fruit of the gospel in the way you all dressed in the special presence of God in the midst of his gathered people modestly, attractively, tastefully, and distinctively feminine so that in the language of 1 Peter, after a while seeing the contrast with the world where all sexual distinction is blurred for the most part, it would awaken in them the question: why is it that the women in this place, they're not all dressed in tents and gunnysacks and pre-burka outfits. They're dressed attractively, tastefully, but modestly and distinctively feminine. What does this? And then you have a wonderful opportunity to say, "This is what the gospel does. I was once someone who bought into society's notion in which the more seductive it is, the more attractive it is. That's what I once was. God has veiled my heart in modesty and now I veil my body to reveal my heart. Furthermore, I was once someone that thought all of these sexual differences rose and relationships were culturally imposed by the culture and power and by a male dominated society and therefore I welcome the opportunity as much as possible, dress like a man, cuss like a man, smoke like a man, do everything like a man, but God saved me and now I see the glory of being a woman. And I praise God for the privilege of being a woman." Or in the case of somebody brought up in the church and never went out into those things in the world, for you to be able to say, "I dress differently from the world because by the grace of God I have been reared in a home where my mother is distinctively a woman in her demeanor, her bearing, how she relates to my dad. In a church where the women welcome male leadership in the eldership, in the diaconate, and are treated like queens, and I want to perpetuate that perspective. I dress the way I dress because of what God has done in my heart. My clothing reflects my heart and the state of my heart is the fruit of the gospel. The gospel did this to me. Christ who died, died, my Bible says, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, purify to himself a people, his own possession, zealous of good works, who would live soberly, righteously and godly in this present evil age."

So on the one hand, you would have some women saying, "God saved me out of immodesty and masculinity of appearance and bearing into modesty and distinctive femininity." Others you could say, "God saved me from ever going into a state of immodesty and a state of non-femininity." You see, that's the burden of our hearts as your pastors. That's the appeal. Would you not welcome this opportunity simply by the way you appear in the house of God?

Well, I've given you the biblical basis for my appeal for distinctive femininity. I've laid out the specific application of that appeal for femininity. Now I want to address some concluding concerns. I've been a pastor for 56 years so I always try to think through if I was sitting there what are some of the thoughts that would come to my mind and try to answer them for you. And the first is this: what this appeal does not assert or imply. Hear me carefully. What this appeal does not assert or even imply. Two things. It does not assert or imply that you as a woman or a young lady will be judged as unspiritual or in rebellion against the will of God if you appear in this place on the Lord's Day in slacks or pants. This appeal does not assert or imply you will be judged as unspiritual or in rebellion against the will of God if you appear in slacks or pants on the Lord's Day. Now it could be that you are. It is possible that some of you sitting here may say, "There's no way these elders are going to step into my wardrobe. I'll wear what I cotton-picking please." You may be, you may appear here in slacks or pants in true clenched-fist, jaw-tight rebellion against God, however until you make that known by your mouth, none of us has a right to assume that because this matter does overlap into the area of Christian liberty. Modesty does not. Modesty of dress is a moral issue. Culturally sensitive dress that reflects biblical norms steps over into some of the areas of Christian liberty and because it does, here are the directives of God that all of us must internalize: none of us lives to himself, none dies to himself. Whether we live, that is as Christians, we live unto the Lord. Whether we die, we die to the Lord. Whether we live therefore or die, we're the Lord's for to this end Christ died and lived again that he might be Lord of both the dead and of the living. Our Lord in terms of our wardrobe and how we dress in any given situation, why do you judge your brother or you again, why do you say it not to your brother? We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, to me every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess to God," so that each one of us should give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another anymore.

Now some of you may say, "Pastor, how could you give this lesson and greet me at the door this morning, I'm here with slacks on and not judge me?" Because God says I shouldn't. Period. And I'm not. "Aw, come off it!" Don't impute your inability not to judge to me. I take these verses seriously and I'm making the appeal that none of us sit in judgment on one another but that we judge ourselves before the Lord to whom we will stand, before whom we will stand in the last day.

So what this appeal does not assert or imply, number 1, it does not assert or imply that you will be judged as unspiritual or in rebellion against the will of God if you appear in slacks and pants on the Lord's Day. Of course, the little p.s. footnote is: if they are distinctively feminine. You show up here with man's pants and a man's shirt with the buttons on the man's side, looking like a man with your hair shaved to the point where people have to look three times to know what it is, then we'll deal with you on the moral issue that you have crossed over the line of appearing as a man and that's a transvestite characteristic that is dishonoring to a child of God. But in terms of a feminine pantsuit, slacks, etc. we do not judge one another.

Secondly, it does not assert, that is, this appeal, that you will be formally admonished as unruly if you appear in pants or slacks. If what you wear is modest, no hugging of the buttocks, thighs or crotch, if distinctively feminine you're not going to be judged by your brethren, judged by your father, mother, one another, or your pastors, certainly not brought to public admonition. If what you wear is immodest, I hope you will be lovingly addressed by husband, father, mother, one another, and if you slip through that grid, then your pastors.

So that's what this appeal does not assert. Secondly, someone asked me after the presentation on modesty why I limited my remarks to the gathering of the people of God on the Lord's Day. Because that's the context of the admonition for modesty in 1 Timothy 2 and I did not want anyone to wiggle out from the pressure of the text by saying, "Whoa, you applied it to everybody." You see, when people have a controversy with God, they'll find the slightest little inaccuracy. This passage in 1 Corinthians 11 obviously envisions the church gathering. The angels are there. There is praying. There is prophesying. And so I have limited my remarks to the gathering of the people of God on the Lord's Day because that's the context of the 1 Corinthians 11 passage.

However, may I say a word about a broader context? Dear ladies, do you really believe that showing up in those well-worn, oh so comfortable faded jeans at prayer meeting is honoring to God? We are known around the world as a church committed to biblical worship and biblical order. What do you think strangers think when on a Wednesday night they see women dressed in sometimes altogether they fit you before you had that last kid or two, jeans altogether too tight and faded. I would just say would you not prayerfully consider whether or not you ought to have a substitute pair of slacks not quite so tight and not quite so old and threadbare that you pull on before you come to prayer meeting. I'm just bearing my heart. What do you have to lose? Nothing. What do you have to gain? Much.

Then a second appeal along that line. Those of you especially with little ones and all kinds of responsibilities that meet you day after day, I know it's so easy first thing in the morning to grab that well-worn comfortable pair of jeans and that old gray sweatshirt, pull on the jeans and the sweatshirt, give yourself to your labors throughout the day, grab your hubby when he comes home from work and give him a little peck on the cheek while you get the rest of the meal on the table and the rest, and then feeling like you've done three days' work to pull the clothes off at 10 o'clock at night, flop into bed, then pull them on the same clothes the next morning. Your children grow up in a home where their image of mom is faded jeans and a sweatshirt. That's their image of femininity. It's reality. My appeal is would it hurt to have one day a week or maybe two, you call them my non-jeans and sweatshirt days.

That's just bearing my heart, asking a question. I'm not making any decrees. I'm not angry. I'm not being nasty. I'm being sweet as I know how. Like Romeo proposing to Juliet up the balcony, "Dear ladies, dear ladies, have you thought this thing through at all?" I think for many of you, you've just never thought it through. So I would plead with

you to think through the implications of distinctive femininity with respect to circumstances other than the house of God.

Then finally, I want to say something growing out of the pastoral visit with a young couple just a week and two days ago. This young mother said, "Pastor, there's something you didn't deal with and address on the matter of modesty and that is for us, many times it's not a matter of rebellion, it's not a matter of seeking to be seductive, it's just we don't want to be bothered. We start out the house door, start out the house in something we know is marginal modest-wise and we say why bother. I've got to strap the kids in the car seats and I've got this to do and that to do. It's just too much of a bother." And I know what some of you are thinking sitting there. "Pastor, you're a man. You don't have a clue what it's like to find a modest dress, to find skirts that cover the knees. You don't have a clue." Yes, I do. I see the frustrations of my wife going through catalog after catalog, going to Penney's trying to find a modest dress. It's not easy but let me ask you: if we're not willing to bear the inconvenience of distinctive femininity and modesty, are we ready to die for Christ? My Bible says, "If you come after me, you've got to be ready to die for me." Is it dying to go through the hassle of finding modest distinctively feminine clothing? Dear ladies, there's a cost of being a Christian and in our culture with the slide into immodest dress and fewer and fewer places where there are distinctively feminine and modest styles of clothing and lines of clothing, it costs effort and time. But dear people, if we're not willing to pay the price for that, are we ready to die for Christ? I'm serious. Are we ready to die for Christ if we won't pay the price of doing what we need to do to be decidedly modest and distinctively feminine?

That's the appeal of your pastors from our hearts. I searched my heart again and again and said, "O God, am I becoming a Pharisaic legalist?" I don't believe I am. I come to a passage like 1 Corinthians 11 and I say this was important to the apostle. Is it not a shame, is it not a shame, and he's touching external issues that reflect far deeper and more profound issues among the people of God. So I lay my heart before you and make the appeal and let me just repeat that appeal in closing. Dear women, dear young ladies, since you have an opportunity by the way you dress to declare boldly that the gospel has made you in your heart a woman who loves modesty and femininity, should you not desire to appear in the gathering of God's people attired with clothing that is decidedly modest and distinctively feminine? I read that question to a dear brother of mine and he answered instinctively, "Yes, that's what I desire." He was a man but he said, "I believe any woman in whom the grace of God is operative will answer as I have answered."

Let's pray.

Father, we are so thankful that your word is a lamp unto our feet and a light to our pathway. We're thankful that in every detail of life you have both the right to tell us what we are to be and to do, and in your word you have given us the stuff whereby we may know what is pleasing in your sight. Father, anything that I've said this morning that does not have its roots in the scripture and in sound judgment, blow upon it and bring it to nothing. Whatever has been true to your word, seal it to all of our hearts. We pray in Jesus' worthy name. Amen.