

Modesty (Part 2): Put On Righteousness

Martin G. Collins

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A couple of people made the suggestion that I use live models in my sermon today, to demonstrate modesty and immodesty. I thought that was a good idea, so I would like to ask Bill Onisick and John Plunkett to come up, since they were the ones that made the suggestion. Then, to show us a good example, I would like the following people to come up...

Look at what we are up against. There is a flood of immorality and lewdness coming out of the entertainment industry. The smut is showing up in almost every television show now. Programs such as "Sex in the City," "Desperate Housewives," and "Nip/Tuck" have won awards and are promoted as the best thing to watch. I have not seen them; but sadly, I have seen the commercials, and that is enough to turn me off. I do not see how a true Christian can watch such trash, to put it bluntly. The advertisements alone for them are bad enough to turn your stomach and embarrass you, and that is exactly the feelings we should have when we see such things.

I Corinthians 15:33 Be not deceived! "Evil communications corrupt good manners!"

That certainly applies to the things that we see and hear in the media.

What of modesty and nakedness and lewdness? The Bible has much more to say on this issue than we covered in my last sermon. In fact, the Bible begins to address nakedness in Genesis 3 with the revelation that sinful man and woman must be covered, and that public nakedness, which we will call lewdness, is a sin.

In past centuries, Christian peoples were often noted for their modesty; and heathen peoples, for their immodesty. It was like wearing a banner or a flag. Today, the line between the professing Christian and the savage tribesman has become increasingly blurred as more and more "Christian" people resort to more than the pagan practices of scarification, tattoos, and body mutilation. They have thrown off the "restraints" of modest dress in favor of the trendy and the physically revealing. The result is that modern America has been publicly undressed. What is worse is that Americans have come to think of lewdness as normal and acceptable, even preferable.

Many people, especially men, have complained about immodesty in the clothing of some women and girls in the church. They have been embarrassed by such things as plunging necklines that expose the cleavage and exposure of the midriff area, especially the rolls of fat just above hip-hugger pants. My son-in-law works for a restaurant, and he said that he has not found a man yet that finds that attractive in any way. Thin bras that show everything, especially when the room is cold also embarrass them, as well as tight blouses.

Who would come before God dressed like this to worship Him? I mostly blame the husbands and fathers for such things, because I cannot imagine a prudent man's wife coming to services looking like they do sometimes, exposing so much. Husbands, do you not love your wives? Fathers, do you not love your daughters?

Today, my emphasis is on moral and spiritual qualities related to the function of clothing. First, though, let us look at what God has to say about nakedness, lewdness, and shame. He has a lot to say about it in both the physical and the spiritual sense. As evidenced by the Song of Solomon and numerous other portions of scripture, sexual relations between man and wife are neither shameful nor sinful. However, after Adam's initial sin, nakedness became a biblical euphemism for male and female reproductive organs and is most often associated with shame. It also regards sinful or shameful sexual acts. Moses used terminology similar to "uncover the nakedness" to refer to the committing of sinful, sexual acts, as well as referring to the idolatry of the nation of Israel.

Leviticus 18:6-7 "None of you shall approach anyone who is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness: I am the LORD. The nakedness of your father or the nakedness of your mother you shall not uncover. She is your mother; you shall not uncover her nakedness."

Leviticus 18: 11-18 goes on to specifically list many other sins involving uncovering nakedness. A lot of it has to do with uncovering the nakedness of relatives and that type of thing. Here, there can be no argument. According to God's Word, uncovering someone's nakedness for the purpose of unlawful sexual relations is sinful and shameful. Obviously, these are secret or private acts. What about public displays of nakedness?

Perversions of the flesh either accompany or eventually follow idolatry. This common sin of the children of Israel was seen after the crossing of the Red Sea when the people built the golden calf, ate, drank, rose to play, and danced. Those actions in and of themselves were not wrong, but it was the way that they did it and the reason that they did it. Some commentators speculate that some were engaging in a type of religious prostitution or orgy, connected with the people's worship of the golden calf. That was typical of what went with such worship of such idols throughout the Gentile nations.

The idolatrous ceremonies that accompanied the worship of foreign gods in ancient Israel commonly involved lewd and sexually explicit behavior. Around the time of Christ, Corinth was known the world over for its temple prostitutes. Young virgin girls were required to serve first in the temples as prostitutes for a time before they could get married. Human nature does not change. We still have the same tendencies today.

Now many young girls prostitute themselves for a night on the town paid for by their date. I was appalled to hear on a news program when a girl was asked, "What has to happen on a date, or what does it take for you to go to bed with your date?" She said, "Well, he needs to spend at least two dollars for me for a hamburger." She equated it to monetary terms. That sounds like prostitution to me. We see school children dressing like hookers. It has become a way of life for

them. Where are the parents? Why are they not dictating standards of dress for their children? Maybe they are! Maybe they are knowingly teaching their children, starting at age five, the perverse clothing standards of this society. We have to be careful as Christians not to fall into this trap, into this pit.

God prophesied in verse 29, that "Whoever commits any of these abominations [including nakedness and lewdness], the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people." If that is what God is saying to Israel in a physical sense, then it also applies to the church in a spiritual sense.

God's commandment to the children of Israel in Leviticus 18 is very specific concerning "uncovering the nakedness" of someone. According to verses 24-30, "uncovering the nakedness" is an abomination that defiles the land, and the land will vomit out the inhabitants of nations who practice this. The illegal immigration problem in this country makes us feel as though we are being pushed out of our own land. I cannot help but wonder if that is not associated with the lewdness in our country. The Boyers, from France, feel the same way about the Muslims moving into France. The native Frenchmen and women feel as though they are being pushed out of their own country. France has long been known for lewdness and their nude beaches and such.

The words translated *nakedness*, which specifically refer to the private parts in both Hebrew and Greek, are most frequently associated with shame. Here are just three examples:

Isaiah 47:3 "Your nakedness shall be uncovered, yes, your shame will be seen; I will take vengeance, and I will not arbitrate with a man."

Ezekiel 16:37 "Surely, therefore, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved, and all those you hated; I will gather them from all around against you and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness." [We are seeing this happen to the United States, because of its lewdness.]

Nahum 3:5 "Behold, I am against you," says the LORD of hosts; "I will lift your skirts over your face, I will show the nations your nakedness, and the kingdoms your shame."

These passages have both physical and spiritual applications and clearly teach that the public exposure of one's private parts is associated with shame. Why would anyone want to do that? The lewdness of this nation exposes the moral bankruptcy of the nation. It is sad that the nations around the world have easy access to watching pornography from the United States. Our lewdness in this nation is being exposed to the entire world, just as God told Israel He would do.

Clothing is God's covering, His divine, gracious response to human rebellion. Being unclothed, therefore, becomes a metaphor for being exposed to the judgment of God. This can be seen in

a very literal way in the case of the punishment for prostitution, where the skirt was lifted over the harlot's face, similar to the wording we just read in Nahum 3:5.

Jeremiah 13:26 "Therefore I will uncover your skirts over your face,
that your shame may appear."

When a woman wears a dress with a slit all the way up to her waist, she is uncovering her own nakedness and putting herself in shame.

Nakedness is not limited to exposing the privates. When a man took off his *kuttonet*—the word means "to cover" and refers to the outer garment—he was in a state that the Bible calls naked, *gumnos*. While still dressed in his undergarment, Peter was considered "naked" by biblical standards, because he had taken off his outer garment.

John 21:7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea.

Both the Greek and Hebrew forms mean "without clothing," but in both languages they are used frequently in the sense of "lightly clad" or simply, "without an outer garment." Thus, a man who has cast off his upper garment, the Hebrews called naked.

This is most likely the meaning in John 21:7. Peter was wearing only the *chiton*, which was an undergarment, but this is not necessarily underwear as we know it today. Peter was not sinfully naked in the context of his work. As a fisherman, he was laboring among men away from shore, not publicly socializing in a mixed gathering. However, when he was about to go into a mixed gathering, he put on his outer garment.

He obviously saw a difference between working in his boat and being on shore in the presence of His Lord, because he covered himself, since he was naked, and then swam to Christ. This is very significant and hard for us to comprehend, being in a world that has, for more than a century, worked very hard to use propaganda to shape and mold our thinking that lewdness is acceptable.

According to scripture, then, one does not have to be stark naked to be shamefully naked. *Gumnos* means "naked and stripped bare and without an outer garment," without which a decent person did not appear in public. This second kind of nakedness not only applies to Peter in John 21, but to the prophet Isaiah and King Saul. Peter's undergarment actually covered more of his body than would most modern shorts or swimwear for men today. Though this was not necessarily sinful, it was associated with public shame. A decent person did not appear in public dressed without his outer garment. This is why Peter put on his outer garment before swimming to shore, and why Isaiah was a sign of shame, disgrace, and judgment to Egypt and Cush. The same could be said for the humiliation of the "virgin daughter of Babylon" in taking off the skirt and uncovering the thigh.

Isaiah 47:1-3 "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. Take the millstones and grind meal. Remove your veil, take off the skirt, uncover the thigh, pass through the rivers. Your nakedness shall be uncovered, yes, your shame will be seen; I will take vengeance, and I will not arbitrate with a man."

We see there that taking of the skirt or even uncovering the thigh or making bare the leg was nakedness by biblical standards.

Isaiah's "nakedness" would not even be noticed at any picnic or beach party today. "Making bare the leg" and "uncovering the thigh" are not only viewed as "normal" practice today, they are considered one's liberty.

Additionally, public nakedness went hand in hand with ancient pagan religion. Fashion expert Alison Lurie notes:

Historically ... shame seems to have played very little part in development of costume. In ancient Egypt, Crete, Greece, the naked body was not considered immodest; slaves and athletes habitually went without clothing, while people of high rank wore garments that were cut and draped so as to show a good deal when in motion.

While the naked body was not uncommon for paganism, being without one's outer garment was considered immodest and even shameful among God's people. History shows that God's people cover their bodies in public, while pagans often uncover theirs.

Nakedness also goes hand in hand with demon possession. Demons are bent on defiling and degrading God's creation and lewdness is one of their methods. Satan encourages perversion in dress. Look at the weird clothing and adornment worn by the more perverted entertainers today and the people who are idolized by this society.

Luke 8:26-35 Then they sailed to the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!" For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness. Jesus asked him, saying, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," because many demons had entered him. And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss. Now a herd of many swine

was feeding there on the mountain. So they begged Him that He would permit them to enter them. And He permitted them. Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned. When those who fed them saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what had happened, and came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.

Apparently, because of the demonic influence, the man would not wear clothes. However, when Jesus healed him and placed him in his right mind, he was motivated to cover himself with clothing. As we have seen, God covered Adam in the garden, and it appears that Satan and the demons have been successfully trying to strip man of clothing ever since. It is clear, then, that some forms of public nakedness are shameful and/or explicitly sinful, since God clothed Adam and Eve when they sinned. Exposing the female body, which should be covered from just below the neck to at least the knees, is out of harmony with the biblical model.

I do not normally like talking about myself, but I am going to give you an example that involves a job that I had years ago. I think it will help, for one, to give me a little bit more credibility to the teenagers, and also to help you to realize what even the world recognizes. I worked for a company called Noxell Corporation, which were the makers of Noxzema, Cover Girl, Neutrogena, and some of those cosmetic products that you might recognize. I worked there for just over seven years, and I was the design coordinator for the corporation. My job, because of its requirements, took me into the office of the president and the senior vice president and so on and so forth. At one time, there was an activity that I was invited to that had to do with a new eleven-million-dollar research and development building.

When I went there, I knew that Cheryl Tiegs, the supermodel, was going to be there. As a supermodel, sometimes she was scantily clad, and other times she was not. It depended on what image the corporation wanted to project. At this meeting, she came dressed covered just below the neck and down to the knees, because it was a formal affair, and she knew that a decent type of clothing was required for that type of function. It was interesting also that throughout the corporation, whether it be in the administrative offices—especially the president's secretary—or the sales offices, everyone was always dressed modestly. Here is a cosmetic company that is promoting looks and even sensuality; and they recognized that for credibility and for shamelessness, this needed to be the dress code for the Corporation. Even the world recognizes it. You ladies, when you dress with your cleavage showing and slits up to your waist—not necessarily you in particular but ladies in general—even the world recognizes (and I suppose the ladies recognize it, as well) that you are being sensual or purposely showing off your goods. Again, if you go to Wal-Mart, you will see that those goods should never be shown.

Noxell spent 35% of its income on advertising. They recognized the power of advertising, and they wanted to have the "girl next door" look. Quite often, back in the late 70s and early 80s, the models were more covered than many of the other corporations. Then, the year after I left,

in 1986, Revlon bought it; and immediately the models started to wear a different type of clothing. I just wanted to express that to you because it is interesting that the world does recognize these things; but it is so enticing to them, and Satan pushes them along.

Since exposing the privates is shameful, according to God's inspired written Word, it seems obvious that clothing which emphasizes or purposely draws attention to these areas of the body is likewise shameful and immodest. Bikini-type swimwear is the epitome of these things by design—by the intentional design of perverted designers!

Historical evidence shows that modern swimwear was and is designed to get the public used to immodest nakedness. Jeff Pollard, in his booklet *Christian Modesty and the Public Undressing of America*, copyright 2003, which I am using as one of my sources throughout these two sermons, states this: "After a good bit of research, I discovered that the fashion industry employed swimwear to change public opinion about modesty. In other words, fashion designers used swimwear to undress America."

According to his booklet, in the 1800s in America,

Swimwear designers wrestled with a perplexing problem: swimwear had to function in the waves and on the beach, from the dressing room to the water's edge. The standards of modesty at that time clearly demanded concealment, yet functionality in the water demanded abbreviation.

And given the fact that the fashion industry was not generally guided by God's Word, nothing but the old-fashioned view of modesty stood in the way of exposing more and more of the body. What the evidence reveals and what we must bear in mind is that the streamlining and deletions in swimwear were clearly by design.

Here we pause and reflect on this fact: what was taking place on the beach was the beginning in modern times of the violent clash between the Holy God as the designer of clothes, and sinful men as the designer of clothes.

Fashion designers did not view swimwear as simply functional garments with a specific use like overalls. They envisioned their creations as highly fashionable garments, and therefore designed them both to reveal and arouse. What they clearly understood is that this new aquatic garment was merely a symbol of dress.

This is why swimwear ultimately evolved into a form of nakedness thinly disguised as dress. Moreover, they were aware that they were undressing the American public and constantly challenged the legal limits of public nakedness.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to

God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The real issue in our own lives is this: Who is your lawgiver, God or man?

Swimwear manufacturers knew exactly the course they planned to follow, and it was not the word of God that they were following. In part, thanks to the influence of the more daringly cut French swimsuits, the American bathing costume underwent a revolution. Until that time, bathing attire had been modeled on street wear. By the 1890's, however, underwear began a relentless, if slow, migration outward that would come to a full, triumphal exposure in the bikini of the 1960s. It should be no surprise, then, for us to learn that what the conceivers of the suit strove to suppress was the natural association between underwear and swimwear, a cogent and undeniable comparison.

It was also true that the women's swimwear industry, in its early stages, was closely affiliated with the bra and girdle industry, just as menswear for swimming was intimately, as it were, connected with the underwear business. In reality, often there is little difference between underwear and swimwear other than how it is advertised and marketed.

At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, what was naked and lewd in the city was suddenly perfectly justifiable and permissible at the beach. If we think this through, as Christians, this shift from street wear to underwear as a model certainly cannot be defended as a move toward modesty. Nevertheless, American society began to legitimize public nakedness.

Why was skin not public in America until "modern" times? Simply put, our culture, in general, sprang from a biblical worldview that included covering the body. The nation has always been a secular nation; but because the Bible was the main book that was read, God had His influence on culture.

What change in this society put skin on display? The evidence seems to be that Christian morality and its attending modesty, which had previously served as resistance to public nudity, simply caved in to growing public pressure. Of course, Satan was behind it all, pushing it forward. The voice of God's Word was slowly but surely drowned out by the voice of an increasingly secular medium—the fashion industry—and public opinion.

Since this nation has never been entirely Christian, our culture's basis for modesty eroded almost to the vanishing point. As we all know, human anatomy was cast in a bold, provocative new light. Because the swimsuit became increasingly brief and tight, it became increasingly erotic. This single garment made it possible to expose and eroticize parts of the human anatomy that had previously been concealed. The human body was on display in public in a way previously unthinkable in American culture.

The conflict erupting over swimwear was not simply a matter of taste; the metamorphosis of the bathing suit forced our society to reassess its views of modesty. This was a cultural war; and in the case of Christians, it is a war with principalities. As a nation, we shifted from the biblical view of covering the body to an exhibitionist view of showing off the body. Sadly, most

people have nothing to show off but do anyway. The result, for the rest of us, is that we are "grossed out," in the modern vernacular, sickened and embarrassed for them. It is sad.

To illustrate this point, let us chronicle the evolution of America's public undressing during the 1900s. Women's arms were exposed in the first decade. Though this may seem laughable to some in our day, this was a major shift in thought. Women's arms and shoulders were usually covered in public. This change, however, was just the beginning.

The controversy of body concealment versus body display raged on into the 1920s as legs and backs were progressively bared. Cleavage appeared in the 1930s. In their headlong pursuit for more freedom and maximum exposure, swimwear designers got rid of the overskirt, which had been standard equipment for most feminine swimming attire. Since both men and women wanted to showcase their tan bodies, the legal prohibitions designed to protect public modesty were regularly challenged and all but discarded. Public resistance barely whimpered, slid its clothes off, and joined the crowd.

A technological marvel took place in the 1930s and 1940s, and a major shift in swimwear design followed. New fiber and fabrics allowed the body beneath to come out. These fabrics made it possible to expose more of the body's curves. The body hidden underneath the bulky old suits of the past was now literally emerging into the light of day.

A two-piece suit first appeared in 1935 on the pages of fashion magazines. This bared a few inches of flesh between its two parts. Though some wore this daring item, it would not really become fashionable until the 1940s. It took ten years or so for the public to even get up the nerve to wear the two-piece.

During the 1940s and 1950s, two-piece suits bared the midriff. Also popular was the maillot, which was designed with holes and openings to reveal midriff and sides. The maillot focused on the hips and became tighter. Once again, new fabrics made this possible. Now the body underneath could be amply exposed, emphasized, and exploited in breathtakingly skin-tight costumes, while its designers could declare that it was "covered." The maillot inched ever lower on the bosom and crept higher on the leg. Most of the newest suits went strapless. Bared shoulders and skin-tight waistlines and bosoms filled the shoreline like high tide.

During this period when swimming attire focused on the body's curves, men with cameras focused on them, too. Models smiled and bared themselves for the media, their bodies adorning virtually every kind of advertisement. Young sirens in bathing suits became a standard item for American merchandising, which marketed everything from automobiles to political campaigns.

Quoting Jeff Pollard again,

The navel was exposed in the 1960s and 1970s; then, in the 1970's high cuts revealed hips. Designers bared women's thighs sometimes to the waist, which bedazzled the American public with yet another erogenous zone. This made the so-called "conservative" one-piece suit more erotic than ever.

And with each new fashion season, the creators of swimwear shifted

and manipulated the new fabrics to unveil yet another part of the body. Their garments virtually shouted at onlookers, "Look here! Now look there!"

And in the 1980s and 1990s even more radical expressions like thongs revealed buttocks and thin unpadded material revealed nipples.

Sadly, very sadly, I have seen this type of clothing being worn by women attending Sabbath services, and I have been very embarrassed by it. I know the rest of the men have been as well, because they have said something to me. Since we are appearing before God, maybe God was embarrassed, too.

It is crystal clear that the creations of swimsuit designers are to expose as much human flesh as possible. Yet there remains in our society a few lingering twinges of bashfulness. As one contemporary historian wrote, "Even today, when the body has become a marketable package, making a public appearance in a bathing suit can be a disquieting experience."

When the new "molded-fit" swimsuits were introduced in 1933, they were actually touted as the answer to nude bathing: "No other human device can even approximate that utter freedom, that perfection of fit, at rest or in motion, that airy but strictly legal sense of wearing nothing at all."

This advertisement was not written in the '60s nor did it appear in *Playboy* magazine. It was in Harper's Bazaar in 1933! That is how the swimsuits were described.

For over 100 years, this single garment—the swimsuit—has served as the most important vehicle for the public undressing of America. History clearly demonstrates that the swimwear manufacturer's vision has often fiercely collided with the laws of the land—but more importantly, it has also fiercely collided with the holiness of God.

Please, ladies, it is not my intention in any way of putting you down or embarrassing you, since the large majority of you are very modest in your dress. I compliment you for that in a world that makes it so hard to buy the appropriate clothing. When my wife went shopping to buy a dress for the Feast, she gave up because she just could not find something that she liked as far as material that did not have a plunging neckline down to the cleavage. She did not buy one for the Feast.

If you teenage girls use that excuse that you cannot find something to wear, then you might have to make something. Not being able to find something modest to wear is no excuse for buying something immodest and wearing it. I know it is hard on you; I have had two daughters to raise through the teenage years, and they had the same problem. It is not that we do not sympathize with you. We do. We feel very bad that you have to grow up in this world and put up with these things. However, you are all at the Red Sea, and you teenagers have to make a decision on which way you are going to go. Are you going to stay in sin, with Egypt, or are you going to go on with the Israelites through the Red Sea and be baptized at a later date? Are you going to glorify God in your dress? The decision is yours. That is one thing that God gives you, that choice.

When we have made our commitment to revere and submit to God when He calls us, we make a covenant with God. In a similar way, Job made a covenant with both his conscience and his eyes. God is the Judge; and we are therefore bound not to look on anything with a lustful or covetous eye, by which our conscience may be defiled, or God dishonored by our thoughts or actions as members of His church. It is hard for men not to look at such things. Women have a responsibility to help us not to look.

Job 31:1 "I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?"

Look upon here means "to look intently or gaze," as the margin says. You might say, "to look too long at a young woman," or look at her in the wrong way.

The first virtue of his private life to which Job refers is chastity. He obviously places great importance on this and on avoiding the danger of exposure to immorality. He had solemnly resolved not to think wrongly about young women or even to look too long at them. A covenant is of a sacred and binding nature, and the strength of his resolution was as great as if he had made a solemn compact. He was determined not to let himself fall into that pit. By the language here, Job means that he had resolved, in the most solemn way, that he would not allow his eyes or thoughts to endanger him by improperly contemplating a woman.

Men and boys in this society have their work cut out for them in resisting the enticements of the women of this lewd society. With the constant influences from this world's styles and the indecency of pornography, we see a society that has lost any sense of decency. I think it is safe to say that we live in an insane society. Many teenagers and young adults today try to copy the immodesty of the entertainers that they admire. The result has been a people who increasingly look like prostitutes, pimps, and gang members.

There is another psychological facet to the reduction of clothing compared to total nudity: The packaging can be generally far more erotic than raw nudity. Alison Lurie, author of *The Language of Clothes*, observes that "some modern writers believe that the deliberate concealment of certain parts of the body originated not as a way of discouraging sexual interest, but as a clever device for arousing it." According to this view, clothes are the physical equivalent of remarks like "I have got a secret"; they are a tease, a come-on. It is certainly true that parts of the human form considered sexually arousing are often covered in such a way as to exaggerate and draw attention to them. Every human being that is even slightly aware of his or her sexuality knows this. The same thing applies to short skirts, tight pants, skimpy tops, short-shorts, and a variety of clothing that conceals and reveals the body underneath.

We must all wake up and realize that the fashion industry does not believe that the principal purpose of clothing is to cover the body; it believes that the principle purpose is sexual attraction. This is the direct opposite of Christian modesty. It is contrary in every way to God's design of clothing for Adam and Eve. We need to sit up and take notice that we are being influenced in such a big way by our society and resist it. Whatever is good for nothing or evil in its operation, whatever is wicked in its principle, and whatever would lead us away from righteousness and truth, we should not set before our eyes.

Psalms 101:3 I will set nothing wicked before my eyes.

The gods of fashion spoke through images on the large and small screens of America and laid hold on its collective imagination like no other media phenomenon in history. The media, especially television, transformed the way young people thought. Because of its powerful and seductive images, idolatry subtly and potently transformed completely from silent images of stone and precious metals into living icons that bared more and more flesh. Nevertheless, the most shameful example of Hollywood's astonishing sway over America's minds was not seducing women to strip naked, but men. The apostle Paul tells us that Eve was deceived, but that Adam followed her with his eyes open. Like Adam, American males have followed the "Eve" of Hollywood into public nakedness. The following revelation should humble every man listening to this sermon.

During the 30s, according to Kidwell and Steele in their book, *Men and Women*,

The upper torso became the new focus of concern, and male swimmers who bared their chests in public not only forfeited respectability but faced the penalty of arrest as well...the "nude" look in swimsuits made a mockery of the laws. Apparel Arts in 1932 reported that "many of the bathers of this year...swam shirtless, wearing only a pair of trunks."

How far have we come? It is amazing. I have to admit that I was in ignorance of most of this myself until researching for this sermon. Swimwear designers "fashionably" pressured men to go topless and offered them two-piece swimwear. This "Depression Suit," as it was called, had a removable shirt that could be tucked in, buttoned, or attached to the trunks with a zipper. This was no small contest in the long civil war for modesty. According to Martin and Koda in their book *Splash*,

For nearly three decades, a battle of decency, decision, and decree were fought at the water's edge. In the fourth decade, women's bathing attire changed little in terms of decency, but men's chests became the new field of skirmish...Hollywood's men went topless in the 1930s (though airbrushed into the 1950s to avoid the brutality of body hair), and the nation-wide trend, expressing physique while suggesting sensuality, followed with alacrity.

In other words, when swimwear designers and their Hollywood connections pressured men into the strip show, they eagerly cast off their tops along with their manhood. Some few of you may remember that when Clark Gable was the first man to take off his shirt and be on screen in his t-shirt, it was scandalous across the nation.

Guilt for this decaying and debauched state must not be laid entirely at the feet of women, as it often is. The problem lies squarely with the men in the pulpits and the homes of this nation.

With the near-dissolution of Christian manhood in this century, American males have become feminized sex-worshippers who do not lead but are led. They have followed their silver-screen icons into nudity and not the purity of Jesus Christ. Had they followed the God of holiness and governed their hearts and eyes as instructed by God's inspired written Word, the present lascivious culture would not and could not exist here in the United States in a public way as it does.

Nevertheless, any who dare to speak against public nakedness are quickly decried as legalists, Pharisees, and, worst of all, fundamentalists. I cannot help wondering where the husbands in the church are when their wives come to Sabbath services with thin tops and bras, leaving nothing to the imagination of the other men in the congregation. Ladies, if you do not have a husband attending with you or you are single, please check your clothing by looking in a mirror before you come. Is your blouse too tight and gaping open? When you sit down, are you well covered? Whatever you see in that mirror, we see! Do you fathers monitor your teenagers' clothing?

Maybe I should say, do *we* fathers monitor our teenagers' clothing? We should.

In a world that has so many distractions and where we are so busy, it is very easy to neglect such things as this because we are all being programmed by this society to slip right into it with the rest of the world. There was a graph in the *Good News* magazine back in the late 60s, I think it was, where they showed the decline of the world and just above it was a decline in the church, parallel to it and going the same way. It was not as bad but going in the same direction. We all have to be very careful that we do not allow the world to pull us down.

There was a time just under seventy years ago when the laws of this nation declared public swimming in trunks without a shirt to be nudity. What a change! Hollywood has progressively seduced several generations into nakedness and lewdness. There is not a person in this room, male or female, who does not have a mind saturated with sensual images of bodies clad in erotic swimwear—images that are permanently seared into the memory by television commercials, magazine ads, billboards, and numerous other media.

Several years ago, children in elementary school were asked how they knew what was popular to wear in school. Most said, "Whatever is on a TV commercial." It was simple enough for them to decide what to wear. Where were the parents, though? Tragically, for many people, these seductive images have further enticed their lustful hearts into the death grip of addiction to pornography.

In Ezekiel 16, God tells Israel that he will "recompense" or "return in kind" their deeds on their own heads and that "you shall not commit lewdness in addition to all your abominations." Ezekiel gives a very graphic description of how God will expose Israel's nakedness to all her previous "lovers."

Ezekiel 16:35-39 "Now then, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD!
'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Because your filthiness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your harlotry with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children

which you gave to them, surely, therefore, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved, and all those you hated; I will gather them from all around against you and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. And I will judge you as women who break wedlock or shed blood are judged; I will bring blood upon you in fury and jealousy. I will also give you into their hand, and they shall throw down your shrines and break down your high places. They shall also strip you of your clothes, take your beautiful jewelry, and leave you naked and bare.""

A body unclothed is not only cold, but a body undressed of clothing and jewelry is a body stripped of the insignia of social standing and identity. A naked body is not a sign of freedom, as this society tries to promote, but is an incalculable loss of place and honor.

Ezekiel 16:40-43 ""They shall also bring up an assembly against you, and they shall stone you with stones and thrust you through with their swords. They shall burn your houses with fire, and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women; and I will make you cease playing the harlot, and you shall no longer hire lovers. So I will lay to rest My fury toward you, and My jealousy shall depart from you. I will be quiet, and be angry no more. Because you did not remember the days of your youth, but agitated Me with all these things, surely I will also recompense your deeds on your own head," says the Lord GOD. "And you shall not commit lewdness in addition to all your abominations.""

Of course, the spiritual principle here is that Israel had committed spiritual prostitution with other nations through her unholy alliances and secret treaties, welcoming the religions of other nations within her gates and joining in worshipping the gods of other nations.

James addresses part of this principle when he says,

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

If we fall into that bottomless pit of the fashion designers' uncovering of us, then we are at enmity with God. That is quite a statement, very serious.

The United States has excelled in spiritual adultery with other nations. Just look at the rapid increase of religions from around the world springing up everywhere here in the U.S. However, looking at the literal side of the duality here, we find that many of the people of Israel had exposed themselves in lewdness, uncovering their nakedness. Ezekiel minced no words in warning Israel, "In your filthiness is lewdness" (Ezekiel 24:13). Lewdness is bitter and poisonous but enticing to those who are corrupted by lusts of seduction. Nudity is a powerful

enticement, as we recall of the sin between David and Bathsheba. Adultery and fornication are born of lust; they thrive on uncontrolled desire. The process is clearly expressed by the apostle James:

James 1:14-15 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.

Mark recorded Jesus' wisdom regarding the source of immorality and immodesty:

Mark 7:21-23 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

There we see the true source, the true place where the sin develops: it is in the heart.

Paul reminds us about the kind of life the world lives, and the need we have for a clean break from it. The apostle Paul elaborates on the source of immorality and lewdness. Notice he also refers to the mind and heart.

Ephesians 4:17-19 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated *futility* in verse 17 is sometimes associated with idolatry. The primary reference here is to good-for-nothing notions underlying irresponsible behavior. When a temptation comes before a person, if that person has given no thought to resisting—that is, has not trained his mind to have purposeful thoughts rather than good-for-nothing thoughts—he will succumb to the temptation; his desire will kick in; and he will sin.

Lewdness in the form of pornography provides the temptation and draws the desires simmering within to the surface. In a decadent society, those lusts bear the fruit of horrible sexual crimes: adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, rape, child molestation, and incest. Lewdness degrades what God created in His image. It brings man, who is created a little lower than the angels, down to the level of the animals. It is an affront to the Lord God; all that it glorifies and promotes is in direct and open violation of God's law.

After Genesis, clothing became an image for both sinfulness and redemption. It was not God's intent to cover sinfulness; it was God's intent to properly and modestly clothe mankind and show them how to put on righteousness. That was just a type of putting on righteousness. On

the side of sin, for example, we read in Psalm 73:6 about the arrogant wicked whose violence covers them like a garment and in Malachi 2:16 about faithless men covering their garments with violence. Jeremiah laments about priests that are so defiled with blood that no one could touch their garments as they wandered through the street. On the other side, we find salvation pictured as a garment, and it is God who clothes us with these spiritual garments. As we put on righteousness or, in other words, "live righteously," it is God who actually covers us with the robe of righteousness.

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful 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 with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Speaking prophetically of the church, Psalm 132 says,

Psalm 132:16 I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.

When a priest puts off his ordinary garments and puts on linen garments to perform his religious functions, the action signifies consecration of the priest for spiritual duties. To remove the priestly garment means cessation of sacred duties and a return to the ordinary routine.

The most extreme form of divesting clothing is expressed by the strongly negative action of stripping, implying subjection to a being or army with superior power. In one sense, when a person removes certain items of clothing or wears clothing that does not properly cover, he is stripping himself. He is implying that he is in subjection to some strong force, and that strong force would be Satan.

The garments of Joshua, the high priest, are used to portray God's forgiveness of sin. God Himself commands His angel to strip off Joshua's filthy clothes.

Zechariah 3:1-5 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes." And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by.

Dressed in "filthy clothes" as he stands before the Angel of the Lord, accused by Satan, Joshua

hears the Angel command onlookers to remove his filthy clothes and put "rich robes" on him. These clothes are also called "festive garments" in some translations. Here, in symbolic action, is the story of salvation.

The angel explains that the action is "an omen of things to come," which will be accomplished by "my servant the Branch," that is, the Messiah.

Zechariah 3 6-9 Then the Angel of the LORD admonished Joshua, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'If you will walk in My ways, and if you will keep My command, then you shall also judge My house, and likewise have charge of My courts; I will give you places to walk among these who stand here. Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH. For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.'"

This is a picture of what God does when He saves a person. First, He takes away sin. Then, He adds or imputes to the sinner, saved by grace, His own divine righteousness, as we see implied in verse 5. The act of causing Joshua's sin to pass from him represents justification. God's forgiveness is suitable for a court of law; it is absolutely legal in every sense of the court of heaven. Joshua's cleansing is applied to that land, that is, the people in verse 9—evidence that more than Joshua himself is referred to here. It also refers to the children of Israel and God's church.

Next, Joshua was to be clothed with rich garments—God's representative clothed in God's righteousness. God's servant went from filthy garments to rich robes. The Hebrew word for *rich robes* in verse 4 is used only here and in Isaiah 3: 22. It speaks of purity, joy and glory; but the main significance is that they symbolize the restoration of Israel to her original calling. There is a contrast here: Joshua in filthy garments represents Israel as a priest but defiled and unclean; Joshua in rich robes represents Israel's future glory in reconsecration to the priestly office. It is God who causes sin to be removed, ultimately on the basis of the blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This redemption reaches its reality in the Kingdom of God, where the saints, as Christ's bride, have white robes made possible by the blood of the Lamb. The church herself is like a bride adorned for her husband. She is not adorned in filthy rags nor scant clothing—certainly not a swimsuit—but rich white robes.

There may be an infinite number of God-honoring approaches to dress, relative to a specific culture. What must be maintained is the applying of these unchanging principles of scripture to the ever-changing facets of our cultural circumstances. I am not speaking of situation ethics; I am speaking of always maintaining God's standard through any culture but in a minor way adjusting it so that we set a good example of God's way of life. In the Bible, it is common to compare moral conduct or traits of character with various articles of apparel. When Job sums up his life, he claims,

Job 29:14 I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban.

Job tells us that righteousness and justice is his covering; he is adorned with it. The apostle Peter admonishes us to be "clothed with humility," and we are also to be clothed with the "garments of salvation." Humility should drive us in how we choose our clothing and what we wear.

The saints in the millennium and the kingdom of God will be modest. Will you be among them? They will not dress immodestly, as people do today. Has the immodesty of this society affected you? Have you been undressed without knowing it? As kings and priests in the Kingdom, we certainly want to make sure we do not have filthy priestly garments now. We have to represent God modestly.

Modesty, decency, purity, and holiness are an essential part of God's way of life; they will be an essential part of the thoughts and actions of those in God's Kingdom. As the firstfruits of the Kingdom of God, God willing, and as kings and priests in the Millennium and beyond, we must put on moderation and propriety; we must put on modesty and holiness; we must put on righteousness! Whether we are putting on righteousness or not can be reflected in our dress. We should put on righteousness, in both a mental, spiritual sense and a physical sense.