

Parenting Tools:
Striving For Modesty



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Addressing Modesty

Though it can be easy to think of modesty solely in terms of external appearance or of how much skin we reveal, the biblical definition of modesty involves the internal motives of the heart. Below are three biblical principles related to modesty that can help you navigate this issue with your children regardless of their gender or age.

1. Clothing, or lack thereof, is an expression of the heart (1 Timothy 2:9–10)

Clothing, or lack thereof, is a visible expression that reflects a person's heart. For example, clothing can be used to show respect or rebellion, authority or aggression, personality or pride. As you address the clothing decisions of your child, we encourage you to look at the clothing as a reflection of your child's heart rather than to exclusively narrow the issue down to a question of style, brand, cost, or amount of clothing.

Here's the bottom line: do not address the clothing without addressing the heart of the child. In 1 Timothy, Paul advises the women to dress in a way that will reflect their hearts. Paul says if a woman's heart is to profess godliness and perform good works, then she will dress in a way that is in accord with those good works. In the same way, by addressing the issue of modesty with your child early on, you can help him or her see how even an act as seemingly simple as dressing ourselves is an opportunity to express our love for God and help us accomplish good works for His Kingdom.

2. Christians have a different standard of beauty from the world (1 Peter 3:3–6)

In Christ, we have a different standard of beauty from the world. Help your child understand that while the world views beauty in terms of luxury and physical appearance, Christ defines beauty in terms of the “gentle and quiet spirit” of a person’s heart. The world’s beauty will surely fade, but there is an imperishable and precious beauty that comes from living according to Christ’s standard.

3. Dressing modestly reveals submission to God (1 Corinthians 11:1–15)

Dressing modestly ultimately reveals that a person lives under submission to God and the authority that He has placed over that person’s life. Knowing the historical background of the church in Corinth is of great value when reading 1 Corinthians 11. In the church at that time, there was a movement among the women to avoid submitting to their husbands. Desiring to visibly express independence from the men, these women turned to dressing in their culture’s immodest ways. In those days, the sexually immoral women would dress with their heads uncovered to signal to the men that they were available and willing for sexual promiscuity. Therefore, in 1 Corinthians, Paul pleads with the women to dress in a way that reflects that they are not independent from their husbands. Paul urges the women to return to submissiveness to their husbands, which was God’s design for marriage from the very beginning in Genesis.

Godly teens dress in a way that reveals they are under authority. Modesty is not just an issue of personal looks but, more significantly, a matter of submission to God-given authority. Girls should not dress scantily because this shows independence and reveals that they think the value of their bodies is merely in their appearance. Conversely, dressing modestly shows that a person’s

life is respectful and dependent on God’s authority. Teenagers reflect modesty by remaining under the authority of their parents.
Concluding Implications of Modesty for Men and Women

1. Godly women should dress in a way that shows that their true beauty is not in their looks but in their godly hearts.
2. A woman’s modest dress lets a godly man know that if she were to marry him she would be submissive in a godly way.
3. Men, too, should dress in such a way that reveals that they are under authority. God has placed parents as the primary authority in a young man’s life until marriage. Once married, the man’s authority is Christ. Men should continue to dress in such a way that reflects that they are under Christ’s authority.
4. When men dress modestly, they reveal spiritual leadership. The different brands, logos, and messages on their clothes should not boast about themselves or express arrogance. Men should reveal that they can lead as they are being led by God. Just as the male is head of the female, so, too, Christ is the head of the male.
5. Godly men should dress in a way reveals that their value does not come from their physical appearance but from their godly hearts.