

1 TIMOTHY 2:9, 10

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO BE BITTEN, DON'T PET THE BEAST

“Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.”¹

A 54-year-old British woman tried to pet a lion in the El Arca wild animal sanctuary in Spain. The lion “bit off” her arm.² It is a story that seems to be repeated more frequently than one might imagine. A Siberian tiger bites off a woman’s arm when she attempts to feed it.³ A Polish man using his cell phone to take a close-up of a tiger lost his left arm when the great cat seized it and ripped it off.⁴ A German woman apparently wanted to be near the polar bears, and she was bitten severely.⁵ All these incidents illustrate a truth that appears to have been often forgotten: large animals—especially animals with sharp teeth and huge claws—are dangerous. Such animals are not to be petted; they are to be respected.

Some sins are just as dangerous—if not more so—as the beasts described moments ago. Coddling such dangerous sin invites permanent injury for the unwary who imagine they can play with sin. Though contemporary society ignores biblical mores, mankind always does so at the risk of individual and social welfare. One “beast” that will bite you is provocative dress. Immodesty is ubiquitous in contemporary society. Moreover, it seems to be seldom addressed from the pulpit. Pastors fear offending parishioners with blunt language, though those same parishioners fill their ears with even more offensive language through television shows each evening. I suspect that pastors don’t want to turn off the youth of the congregation, so they adopt a Pollyannaish attitude that by avoiding confrontation of the sins of the youth; they seem to believe that things will eventually “work out” and the youth will become godly. Finally, though parental controls appear to be woefully lacking in modern society, those same parents, perhaps out of massive feelings of guilt, become overly protective of the “feelings” of their children when they believe they are confronted by authority. This is despite the failure of parents to exercise consistent and biblically based discipline for those same children.

In order to understand the instructions Paul provides, we will need to consider the context. At this point in the letter, he is outlining in broad terms Christian responsibility toward the state and toward society in general. Toward the state, Christians are to demonstrate loyalty through praying for those in authority. The reason for this command is the desire of believers to live peaceful and quiet lives that are “godly and dignified in every way” [VERSES 1, 2]. In this way, we provide an environment that is conducive to salvation for the lost.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² “Woman has arm ripped off by lion at zoo,” The Telegraph, 30 Jan 2003
(<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1420541/Woman-has-arm-ripped-off-by-lion-at-zoo.html>)

³ “Tiger Bites Off Woman’s Arm at Zoo in Montenegro,” Foxnews.com, March 13, 2007
(<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,258543,00.html>)

⁴ “Circus tiger rips off man’s arm in Spain,” Sydney Morning Herald, December 4, 2006
(<http://www.smh.com.au/news/World/Circus-tiger-rips-off-mans-arm-in-Spain/2006/12/04/1165080844229.html>)

⁵ “No changes for Berlin zoo even after bear attack,” AOL News, April 14, 2009
(<http://www.aol.com.au/news/story/Woman-bitten-by-polar-bear-at-Berlin-Zoo/1903971/index.html>)

A key to understanding the verses under consideration is the phrase “godly and dignified in every way.” Christians are to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects divine parentage. Adult males are to give themselves to prayer, especially asking for grace to lead holy lives as is fitting for the context. Turning his attention to the women of the congregation, the Apostle begins by saying “likewise.” It is a literary device that reminds us that he is continuing his discussion concerning conduct in the assembly of the saints. In the Christian assembly, adult males are responsible to take the lead in praying and in seeking a holy life for all. In the same way, women are responsible to dress modestly, exhibiting self-control. Christian women are commanded to endeavour to reflect the inner beauty that attends a godly life, not depending on external features to reveal the beauty of Christ. Let’s consider Paul’s instruction to women.

DRESSING TO PLEASE GOD — I am not a fashion maven, nor even a connoisseur of style. Anyone who knows me will know that I have little appreciation of style; I have difficulty coordinating colours. At the risk of alienating the women of the congregation, I am bold to say that there are certain clothes Christian women should never wear. Ever! Whether miniskirts, hip-hugger jeans or skin-tight shirts—they should be avoided. Christian women have a biblical obligation to dress modestly and to reflect holiness. Immodest clothing is not necessary to be fashionable—but one would not know that from multiple examples of professed Christians.

I have witnessed during the course of my life among the people of God a transformation of women’s dress within the assemblies. There is a trend to more casual dress at church, and I am not certain that is all together bad. However, there is a parallel movement toward immodest dress for Christian women. Perhaps this tendency arises from a desire to hold onto our youth. While men are not totally immune to the desire to cling to youth, women, in particular, appear to make a concerted effort to hold onto their youth. One way this is done is through attempting to dress according to the code of youth, which often means revealing sweaters and skirts, bare midriffs and tight jeans, or other items of revealing clothing.

A few years ago Lynda and I attended a church service sponsored by the Gideons. Various groups from the community were presenting musical selections as part of the program. One of the first presentations was by some young women representing a church identified with the Holiness Movement. What struck me was the inappropriate dress for these young women. Each of the young women wore tight jeans that revealed far more than they intended, I am certain. Several wore low cut jeans with tops that left the midriff bare. The genitalia were clearly defined on several of the young ladies and as they raised their arms in praise (?) an inappropriate amount of skin was suggestively revealed.

I grieved as I thought of the many believers who preceded them in the Holiness Movements—believers who were conscientious about their appearance. What grieved me even more was the fact that no one in the audience exhibited discomfort at the lack of decorum or at the inappropriate nature of the dress. The event was hosted by a Baptist church, and no one from that congregation objected to the inappropriate dress. There was a day in the not too distant past when such displays would have been immediately addressed or halted.

I am not suggesting that God places a premium on “frumpy” or “dowdy,” or even on “ugly”; God is the author of beauty and all that He has made is beautiful. However, many contemporary humans confuse seductive with symmetry. Our culture, and perhaps all fallen humanity, teaches us to enhance superficial features to draw attention to ourselves.

Though the Apostle's instructions specifically address women of the assembly at worship, the principle is applicable in a general sense. As Christians, we are responsible to focus on leading lives that are "peaceful and quiet," "godly and dignified." We are to seek the salvation of others, our lives strengthening the pleas that we make as we point others to Christ. The issue for Christians is not either/or when it comes to life and witness; it is both/and. There exists no dichotomy between life and witness; rather, life and witness are integrated. If our lives are not godly and dignified, it is doubtful that we are turning others to righteousness. If we are not telling others of the grace of God in Christ the Lord, our lifestyle is of small moment.

By the same token, Christian women who dress according to the standards of the world are embracing to a false standard of beauty that degrades whatever witness they might otherwise have and renders the power of God in their lives as flaccid and anaemic. The world's attitude toward fashion should not be that of the people of God. Regenerate women are called to be diligent in their efforts to live godly lives—and that includes being aware of their dress, and in particular how they are viewed by others. Adult Christian women are responsible to model decency and modesty for younger women, according to what is recorded in **TITUS 2:3-5**. The instruction is not merely about attitude, but is inclusive of every aspect of modesty by the inclusion of the admonition to "teach what is good." Younger Christian women and girls must be encouraged to resist the call of fashion and the style of the world.

Perhaps it is carelessness or naiveté, or perhaps it is because of busy lifestyles or cultural pressures, but immodest dress has become a serious problem in congregations on Sunday mornings. To make the point, Mary Mohler points to several fictitious examples of Christian women. Clueless Clarice simply pulls something out of the closet before going out, not taking the time to examine herself in the mirror. She is wearing a shirt that is way too tight; and though she sings praise songs all the way to work, she is not modelling modesty.

Disorganised Delores has four children and says she doesn't have the time to consider what she wears. She is out of milk and diapers, and she is fully aware of the admonition of Proverbs 31 to look "well to the ways of her household." She quickly dresses the children, feeling lucky if she can find four pairs of shoes. She finds some shorts that she knows are too tight and too short, but she does need those diapers. She is too tired to care that she is not modelling modesty.

Stylish Stephanie only wears what's fashionable. For her, it is more important to be in vogue than it is to be modest. In fact, in her pursuit of fashion, she jettisons modesty without a thought. It is not that she wants to be immodest, but she permits the world to dictate style, and consequently, it is immaterial whether or not she will be modest.

Frugal Frances only wears what's cheap, and thus some items of clothing may have shrunk, but she will get her wear out of them. Bargain Hunting Barbie buys what is on sale regardless of size, and consequently is frequently forced to wear clothing that is too revealing or too tight. Dieting Diane has one size of everything and often wears clothes that are too small—simply to reward herself for shedding a few pounds. None of these ladies are able to model modesty in the clothes they wear.

Mrs. Mohler calls these cases accidental immodesty. It's not deliberate, but the result is the same and what it looks like to the world is, "These Christian women dress just like we do."⁶

⁶ Mary K. Mohler, **Modeling Modesty**, <http://www.albertmohler.com/documents/ModelingModesty.pdf>

Even a casual reading of the Word of God demonstrates that God cares about how we dress. When our first parents sinned, in an attempt to cover their rebellion against the Lord God they dressed themselves, and God was forced to correct their choice of clothing [GENESIS 3:7, 21]. God expects a distinction between men and women, and that extends to the manner of dress. Certainly, DEUTERONOMY 22:5 is teaching that women should be feminine in their dress.

Have you ever noticed the importance placed upon going against the flow of culture in the Word of God—surely this biblical emphasis includes dressing in modest fashion! Consider a few passages of the Word. Peter instructs women who will be pleasing before the Lord, “Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewellery, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious” [1 PETER 3:3, 4].

It is important to note that neither here nor in the text for this message does God proscribe jewellery or coifed hair; He admonishes against depending upon such things to appear attractive. God is concerned that the beauty of a godly life enhances the outward beauty, and not *vice versa*. Do not distort what God says by creating artificial rules, but do take to heart the necessity of cultivating a beautiful spirit, a gracious and godly demeanour.

Paul’s general caution surely applies to the dress of Christian women, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” [ROMANS 12:2]. Believers must not permit the world to co-opt their decisions, and especially is this true in the manner in which we dress and how we permit ourselves to be defined in the world.

I understand perfectly well that Paul was writing to the young theologian Timothy when he charged, “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” [1 TIMOTHY 4:12]. However, it is difficult *not* to make the application to Christian women, and especially to young women within the Faith. There are biblical standards of modesty. Women, to say nothing of men, are well advised to adhere to these biblical standards, making them part of their lives to the glory of God. We will do well to determine as individuals and as a congregation to set an example for other believers in conduct and in dress.

A WOMAN’S BEAUTY — The Apostle emphasises that beauty is *not* skin deep—it is much deeper than that. True beauty arises from the innermost being of an individual. The Apostle wants the males within the congregation to be distinguished by a life of prayer coupled with gentle and peaceable demeanours. In the same way, he urges women to exhibit that inner beauty that cannot be worked up or painted on; the beauty sought in Christian women is that which grows out of a godly life. Godly women demonstrate the beauty of a quiet life that offers voluntary submissiveness to their own husbands.

This is an appropriate time to touch on a subject that is increasingly ignored in this day. Women are proscribed by the Word of God from exercising pastoral oversight. Paul says that a woman’s beauty is displayed through a quiet demeanour. His precise statement is that women who profess godliness should learn quietly, exhibiting a submissive spirit. I recognise that the word “submissive” has taken on quite a negative connotation in this day. However, the word does not mean that a woman must not have a mind or that she must become a doormat. The emphasis is upon a respectful attitude toward order and authority.

In another place, the Apostle says that if women have questions, they are encouraged to ask their husbands [1 CORINTHIANS 14:35]. Of course, this places responsibility on husbands to study the Word and to seek appropriate application of the Word, assuming spiritual leadership within the home. Each Christian, women no less than men, should develop an inquisitive attitude toward the revelation of the Lord, and husbands and fathers are responsible to encourage that attitude that seeks greater knowledge.

Nevertheless, the Apostle is quite clear in denying women a role as elders or as teachers within the congregation. Listen to 1 TIMOTHY 2:12 as treated by the masterful British biblical translator, J. B. Phillips. "I don't allow women to teach, nor do I ever put them in positions of authority over men—I believe their role is to be receptive."⁷ I don't know that this particular translation softens the sting to determined feminists more than does the translation which I normally use, but it seems to me to be clearer.

The reason given for this prohibition has nothing to do with ability or native intelligence or even with spiritual standing; rather the issue has to do with God's sovereign choice based upon priority in creation and upon the fact that though the man was a rebel, the woman was deceived. God has deemed that these conditions proscribe women from exercising oversight within the congregation and from serving as teachers within the congregational setting.

While it has become popular among modern congregations to encourage women to seek appointment as preachers and as pastors among the congregations of the Lord, they do so without scriptural warrant and in defiance of God's clear proscription. To exercise such authority, and to insist on the right to make authoritative rulings as required of an elder, is to deny the model described by Moses in Numbers [see NUMBERS 30:3-16], which makes husbands and fathers responsible for spiritual leadership within the home. Moreover, to insist upon appointing women to pastoral office requires that one explain away this verse, and similar verses in the Word of God. Of course, contemporary feminist theologians attempt to do precisely that by either reinterpreting the verses in a limited, local context or through rejecting the Apostle's words by designating him as a misogynist who was captive to his culture. This enervates the Word of spiritual authority and disparages the injunctions provided by that Word.

I do not wish to be sidetracked by this discussion, but it is vital to our understanding of what constitutes feminine beauty to understand the prohibition against pastoral oversight. Beauty is not in the eye of the beholder; beauty is the exhibition of the power of the Spirit creating quietness and harmony. Beauty is the reflection of the presence of God's Spirit.

I do not expect the world to understand beauty; the devil did not create beauty—God did! The world can only dimly reflect the beauty the God created, and tragically, the world system will distort the beauty that God has set in place. The natural man can only describe that which is superficial and which lends itself to examination by the natural senses. However, order and symmetry of spirit is a beauty that should not be denied by followers of the Living Saviour.

Males will emphasise that which is sexual in nature, not because it is necessarily attractive, but because it is titillating, or possibly because it is scintillating; and women, blindly following the fashion dictates of males whose spirits have been distorted by sin will adopt that standard of beauty. They will therefore starve themselves, chemically or surgically alter their features, all in a futile attempt to meet a standard that is at best fleeting and at worst distorted.

⁷ J. B. Phillips, **The New Testament in Modern English** (The Macmillan Co., © 1958, 1960) p. 437

Peter describes that beauty that is sought especially in godly women when he admonishes, "Let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord" [1 PETER 3:4-6a]. Beauty, according to God and as viewed by godly people, is a reflection of God's Spirit at work in the life of the believer.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR BROTHER — In the course of the message this day, we have established that God *does* care how we dress and that beauty in the sight of God does not necessarily agree with beauty as defined by the world. There is yet one other issue which is demanded if we will treat this theme acceptably. Women are responsible to dress modestly, in no small measure because they are responsible for their brothers. To be certain, women are to be modest in their dress and modest in their deportment, because such modesty honours God. However, in honouring the Master, modest women accept responsibility to avoid becoming a stumbling block before their fellow believers.

When I speak pointedly, admonishing modesty in dress, some dear soul will undoubtedly challenge me as tampering rather than presenting the dictates of God's Word. Nevertheless, if you dress so that no one needs to guess at the colour of your underwear, you cannot say that you are dressing modestly. I can tell you after many years in the pulpit that the view presented by some women can only be considered scandalous and salacious. If you find it necessary to do the shimmy in order to get a too-short skirt under you, you have a big problem. If your blouse reveals excessive cleavage or your jeans clearly outline your genitalia, there is a serious problem.

I am not suggesting that you need to dress as though you were preparing to overhaul a tractor, but neither should you dress as though you were planning to be a streetwalker after the service. Neither am I saying that you must wear a plain gingham dress that reaches your ankles, but you will benefit from looking in a mirror before you leave the house. I certainly am not suggesting that you should not be attractive or stylish; I am saying that you must be modest.

I want to speak rather pointedly at this time. Women are responsible for how men view them. I understand that there are women who will argue that men's minds are in the gutter if they see them as sex objects rather than godly women. Unfortunately, ladies, men are so created that they do notice women, and when you dress as though you wish to draw attention to your sexual features, men will notice. You cannot protest that men should not be like that. Such protests sound suspiciously like the description provided in **PROVERBS 30:20**:

"This is the way of an adulteress:
she eats and wipes her mouth
and says, 'I have done nothing wrong.'"

As Christians, we will do well to apply to our lives the words of the Apostle Paul, "This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness" [1 THESSALONIANS 4:3-7].

Did you notice that the Apostle assigns responsibility for each of us to assume control over our own body, and that he also states that failure to do so constitutes a transgression against our brother in the matter of holiness? If I am lascivious and salacious in my deportment toward my Christians sisters, I wrong them. However, if my Christian sisters fail to respect the boundaries demanded by modesty, they have wronged me. We have mutual responsibility to build one another within the Body of Christ, rather than focusing solely on ourselves.

I suspect that I am speaking to people that are not inclined to argue overly much with what I have said to this point. However, there are parents listening who need to get a handle on what their daughters are wearing. Have you seen the ad on television that depicts a teenage girl in a clothing store? She appears in an outfit that is far too revealing and her father objects, saying that he will not pay for the outfit. The girl tartly responds by dialling her credit union and transferring the necessary funds. She'll wear what she wants whether her father approves or not. The ad is disappointing because it says more about our culture than we might wish it did.

Often, teenage girls are allowed to dress immodestly because their parents are trying to be their daughter's friend instead of being her parent. They try to rationalise how they dress by saying, "She's a good kid. She doesn't smoke or drink. She's going to use her own money for this. All of her friends, including most of the girls in her youth group, are wearing this style. Besides, I don't want to ruin this shopping trip." When a young woman dresses immodestly, I can assure you that young men looking at her will not be thinking Sunday School thoughts. Parents are responsible for how their children dress, and godly parents will instruct their children in godliness, enforcing modesty until such time that the child matures and assumes responsibility to continue walking as she was trained.

I realise that I am old-fashioned, but I was determined to raise godly girls. Some items of clothing were verboten in our home. Among the items of clothing that our daughters could not wear, are items of clothing that the daughter of Christian parents should **never** be allowed to wear—halter-tops, cropped tops, tube tops, skin-tight shirts, low-cut shirts, midriff-exposing shirts, miniskirts, short shorts and anything from Abercrombie and Fitch. No doubt some will imagine this sounds like an authoritarian father. It should! I am a parent, and as parents we are given a number of different jobs in raising godly children.

We should not imagine that the world is pulling for us to raise daughters that stand against the tide. We are to love our children, shepherd them and nurture them; but we are also to teach them. Because they're still children, they need direction; and that is a parent's great responsibility. In contemporary society, parents have done a good job of nurturing their children, but modern parents have frequently abdicated the issue of exercising parental authority. Daughters, to say nothing of sons, must not be allowed to follow the crowd simply because that is what the crowd is doing [see **EXODUS 23:2**]. Christian parents are responsible to set biblical rules and ensure that those rules are followed. The world says there are no rules, but God expects His people to be holy in all aspects of life, including their manner of dress.

As parents, we want our kids to love us. I wanted my children to think I was the greatest dad in the world. But at what cost do we seek their love? We are responsible to teach them from the early days that they have to stand for something or they're going to fall for everything. Should we delay teaching them until they are leaving home for college? Perhaps we should wait until they have children of their own and plead with them to do a better job of training our grandchildren? No, we must begin early to teach modesty, and that includes modelling modesty.

Men really do struggle with women's fashion when girls dress without thought to decency and/or modesty; it is the job of those who are parents of daughters to make sure that we don't make the job any harder for parents of sons. Parents of sons will appreciate these words and they will say, "Please continue to proclaim this message wherever you can. What else can we do? We don't have daughters, but we have sons that are looking at how [other parents'] daughters dress." Parents of daughters are responsible to take responsibility for the appearance of our daughters, so that they do not cause your men to stumble.

Richard Baxter, noted Puritan Preacher, said to women, "You must not lay a stumbling block in their way, nor blow up the fire of their lust, nor make your ornaments snares but you must walk among sinful persons as you would with a candle among straw or gunpowder, or else you may see flame which you would not foresee, when it is too late to quench it."⁸ What a timely warning! Christian women must not dress as harlots, deliberately seeking to draw attention to sexual features. Neither must men permit themselves to focus exclusively on sexual aspects of members of the opposite sex.

I'm not excusing men for acting wantonly or for entertaining lewd thoughts—each man is responsible to act in a godly manner regardless of what he imagines the provocation to be. I stress that men must assume responsibility for their own actions. Martin Luther was correct when he said, "I cannot keep the birds from flying over my head; but I can keep them from roosting in my hair." Christian men must treat "older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity" [1 TIMOTHY 5:2].

Ladies, if you dress according to the standards of this world, you are identifying with that which is destined for dust. Dressed as the world dresses, you are not reflecting either the beauty of holiness or the glory of Christ the Lord. You are responsible to bear witness to the grace of Christ the Lord as you walk in the world, and you cannot do so when you look like the world. Those who are part of the world system will dismiss your witness since you look like them. Your life will bear the smell of death rather than bearing the sweet perfume of life if your outward appearance identifies you as belonging to this perishing world. Men will not treat you with the respect due a woman of character if you dress as a harlot dresses.

Parents, if you permit your daughters to dress without modesty, emphasising their sexual features, you are doing them no favours. In fact, you are training them in the ways of this dying world. If they pet the beast of sexual fashion, they will get bitten and you will grieve. I understand very well that in an earlier era, when modesty was fashionable, people still made poor choices concerning sexual relations and women could still act seductive despite society's support of modesty. However, since society has been thoroughly saturated by the spirit of sexual licence, there is very real danger when women fail to maintain modesty.

I understand very well that among the churches Christians want to make outsiders comfortable at worship. There was a day in the not-so-distant past when people looked down on those attending services who were not dressed in traditional Sunday morning attire. However, what started as a well-intentioned move to counter that unholy tendency has gone awry. Today, the floodgates are open and anything goes. It's going to be very hard for us to recover and to take steps to go balance the issue. Nevertheless, the matter must be addressed.

⁸ Richard Baxter, **A Christian Directory of Baxter's Practical Works**, Vol. 1, pg. 392, Cited in Nicholas Jackson, "American Church Undressed," <http://www.newswithviews.com/Jackson/nicholas7.htm>

I pray that parents will be encouraged to train their daughters to be chaste and modest in the midst of a world that is saturated with sex. I pray that parents will train their sons to demonstrate respect toward all women, treating them as fellow beings created in the image of God, rather than seeing them as mere objects to be used for their own gratification. I pray that each Christian woman will accept the biblical responsibility to be a woman of character, reflecting the beauty of holiness even in her manner of dress, and that each Christian husband will encourage his wife to be that model of modesty that honours Him who redeems us by His grace.

Of course, at the heart of the Apostolic instruction is the desire to see others come to the knowledge of Christ the Saviour. We point all to the life that He offers, life that does not wait for some distant time, but life which is available to all who will receive it now. The Word of God declares, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." That Word continues by stating, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved" [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

Our prayer is your salvation. Believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved today. Amen.