

Fig Leaves Were Not Enough

Colin McKee

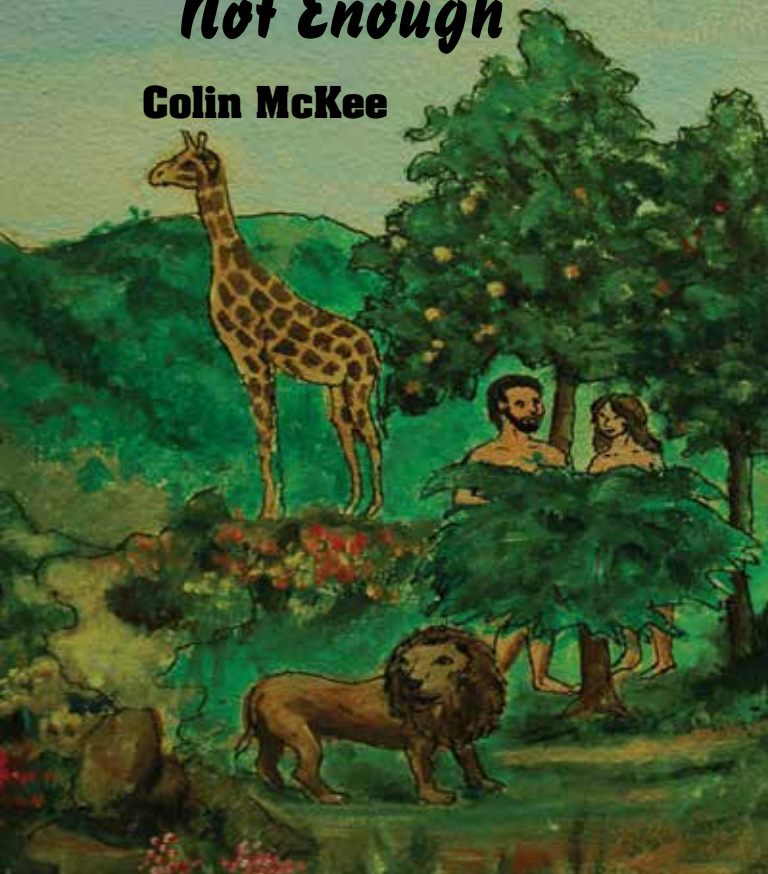


FIG LEAVES WERE NOT ENOUGH

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Is God concerned about how we dress our bodies? Are there principles or passages in His Word to give us guidance on this matter? Some may have given this little thought and have simply let the fashions and styles of the period determine how they dress.

The practices of modern society as they pertain to dress and attire should give us concern about our own decisions relative to the covering or exposing of our bodies. We are constantly bombarded with advertisements, scenes on television programs, clips in movies, and pictures in printed material especially of women scantily clad, or hardly clad at all, and bedroom scenes that bare all. Even programs that have no questionable content will be interspersed with ads that should be R or X rated. Should God's people just accept this and even go so far as to imitate those who

have no compunctions about exposing their bodies to the public gaze?

God's word gives us enough information to make godly choices on this matter and He expects us to be distinctive from the common practices of those who follow the culture of society. Consider Paul's admonition: ***“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.”*** (Romans 12:2)

God's Word and our Bodies

God established a principle for guidance as to how we should treat our bodies in dress, diet, addictions, and relations to others when He said through Paul, ***“...or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore***

glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1Corinthians 6:19,20)

That principle should guide us when we think of drinking alcohol, using drugs or tobacco, overeating, dressing our bodies, and many other things. If a person is aware that his body is the temple/dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, he will not want to do anything that would detract from, or negatively affect, His glory.

God has variously manifested His concern about the exposure of the human torso and the parts of our bodies that are usually covered by undergarments. When Adam and Eve sinned and then made themselves coverings of fig leaves, God was not satisfied with what they had made. It was not girdles or loin cloths that they made. Every other time the word girdle is found in the Old Testament, it is a different word from the one for covering found in Genesis 3:7. The expression in the Septuagint translation

(LXX) is, “aprons to go around them”. The Greek word used in the LXX signifies a “wrap around the body”. It is clear that Adam and Eve made coverings that were sufficient to wrap around their bodies.

God then intervened and made “coats” or “robes” (Genesis 3:21) for them from animal skins. The same Hebrew word translated “coats” in that passage is used in Isaiah 22:21 and is translated “robes”. It is translated the same way in the LXX. That Greek word is also found in Luke 15:22; 20:46, and Revelation 6:11 where it is consistently translated “robes”.

Why did God cover them with robes? Apparently fig leaves were not enough! At best they would only last temporarily and may not have been sufficient to cover body parts that might still need to be covered. After sin entered the world, God must have deemed nakedness as shameful. Otherwise, why would He have made robes for them? There

was still only the two of them – who would see them? It must have been a matter of decorum with God to put sufficient clothing on Adam and Even to robe their bodies; what other explanation makes sense? Maybe He also was considering the effect that nakedness would have on children yet to be born, and on those who would come afterward and therefore was making provision to guard modesty as time unfolded.

We see God's concern again about exposing the human body in the regulations He gave for priests serving at the sanctuary. They were not to go up to the altar on steps so that, “***...your nakedness is not exposed on it.***” (Exodus 20:26) Moses was to make garments for the priests, “***...linen trousers to cover their nakedness; they shall reach from the waist to the thighs***” (Exodus 28:42). They were “***...short trousers of fine woven linen***” (Exodus 39:28). Clearly priests, who dressed in robes for the service, were bound

to wear undergarments (short trousers) so that their nakedness not be exposed. For the male priests, nakedness was the area of the body from the waist to the thighs.

God pronounced a woe on Babylon using the figure of a woman (daughter of Babylon) in Isaiah 47. He said to her, “... ***strip off your skirt, bare your thigh.... your nakedness will be uncovered and your shame will be exposed***” (v.2,3). It was shameful for her private body parts and her thigh to be exposed.

Does God’s Word anywhere indicate that His counsel relative to exposing the private parts of our bodies, especially the torso, has changed? Is it no longer shameful to almost entirely uncover our bodies, even the private parts, just to be accepted by society, and be in step with the mores of people who care not for God’s truth? God warned His people in Leviticus 18:3,4, “***According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you***

dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God.”

Unfortunately His people ignored His clear warning and followed the ways of the ungodly nations around them until they were finally carried away into captivity in punishment for their sins.

I. What Is Modesty?

Whatever God's will may be concerning modesty or appropriate attire it applies to both men and women. The word translated “modesty” in 1 Timothy 2:9 is found only one other time in the N.T. In Hebrews 12:28 it is translated “reverence”. It carries the idea of what is respectful, showing proper respect. The idea in 1 Timothy 2:9, then, would be to dress in a way that shows proper respect for God and

others. God always sees what we wear. Is that skimpy attire, that low-cut revealing blouse, that body hugging attire something in which we want to approach Him? Let us compare various translations of 1 Timothy 2:9:

NKJV: “That the women adorn (katastole) themselves in modest (kosmio) apparel, with propriety (aidous) and moderation (sophrosunes)”.

HOLMAN CHRISTIAN: “The women are to dress (katastole) themselves in modest (kosmio) clothing, with decency (aidous) and good sense (sophrosunes)”.

ESV: “women should adorn (katastole) in respectable (aidous) apparel, with modesty (kosmio) and self-control (sophrosunes)”.

NEW CENTURY: “women should wear proper (kosmio) clothes (katastole) that show respect (aidous) and self-control (sophrosunes).

Green’s Literal: “the women to adorn

themselves in proper (kosmio) clothing (katastole) with modesty (aidous) and sensibleness (sophrosunes)”.

McCord's: “women adorn themselves with appropriate (kosmio) apparel (katastole) in modesty (aidous) and good sense (sophrosunes)”.

ASV: “women adorn themselves in modest (kosmio) apparel (katastole) with shamefastness (aidous) and sobriety (sophrosunes)”.

NIV: “women to dress (katastole) modestly (kosmio) with decency (aidous) and propriety (sophrosunes)”.

W.E. Vine in his dictionary of N.T. Words defines “aidos (aidous) as “modesty, having regard for others”. **Hendrikson** and **Kistemaker** in their **N.T. Commentary** define it as “a sense of shame, proper reserve”. Kosmoi means to put into proper order, to arrange, to be decent, respectable. Katastole is a robe, coat, long garment (Mark 12:38;

Luke 15:22). The root word means “wrap around”, “something let down” (Hendrikson-Kistemaker). **Thayer** says it means a “garment let down”. Katastole, translated “adorn” or “clothing” is found in Isaiah 61:3 in the **LXX** and is translated “garment”. It would seem to be a robe or long garment that wraps around and lets down (drops down), covering the body.

Dorcas made coats (Gr. chitou), close fitting undergarments, shirts, tunics, and garments (Gr. himation), long outer robes or coats. (Acts 9).

The soldiers at the cross took Christ’s garments (himation), outer garment, wrapper (Wharton Marriott of Oxford Univ.), and his inner garment, tunic (chitou) (John.19:23). In N.T. times, the tunic was somewhat like a large T shirt, reaching almost to the knees.

Peter put on his outer garment (fisher’s coat) when he realized Christ

was near by because he was “naked” (Gr. *gumnos*). Peter was not completely nude, but when one took off his outer garment (robe, coat) he was considered naked when only wearing the undergarment. In Acts 19:16 Kittel (**Theological Dictionary of N.T.**) says that “naked” means “without an upper/outer garment”.

The point of this is that the usual dress of N.T. times was both outer garments (coat, robe), and an inner garment (tunic, shirt) and that when one only had on the inner garment he was considered naked. If one was naked when wearing only the inner garment (under clothes), what should we conclude when one wears much less than that for beach/lake, exercise, or recreational attire, or wears something skimpy or low-cut, or attire made of Lycra or Spandex that is so tight that the contour of the body and private parts are distinctly outlined?

Could any stretch of interpretation get

a bikini or body suit or Lycra/Spandex attire out of “katastole”(wrap around, robe, coat)? Every day attire or leisure attire should reflect proper respect for God and for others, as well as self-control, sensibleness, and moderation as seen in the passages above. Does a beach or lake outing distort our thinking? Can anyone see modesty, propriety, in wearing things to get into the water that expose almost the entire body and show in explicit outline the few places that are covered?

Paul’s primary concern with modesty in 1 Timothy 2:9 was with dress that was showy, ostentatious, drawing attention to one’s self. That attire was to attract attention and display pride. But just as wearing overly expensive attire to “show off” was immodest, just so the wearing of attire that “shows off” and draws attention to one’s body by exposure is certainly immodest.

Someone might say, “I’m not ashamed of my body”. It is not a matter of

being ashamed of one's body. Adam and Eve were not ashamed of their bodies after they sinned, but they were ashamed of their sin in violating God's law. If the exposing of too much of the human body is considered shameful by God, then one should be ashamed to cross the boundaries He has set. Israel violated God's law and they could have said (and, in practice, did say), "We are not ashamed", although they should have been ashamed.

"Were they ashamed when they had committed abominations? No! They were not at all ashamed; Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time I punish them, They shall be cast down," says the LORD.
(Jeremiah 6:15)

II. It's Not Just You

It seems that it has become the norm in Western society to demand personal

freedom. Freedom to do what one wants without restrictions, regardless of the impact on others.

Someone wearing revealing clothing may say, “I should be able to wear what I want, and if that bothers you, there is something wrong with you; you are just dirty minded”.

Dalton Gilreath in a sermon on this subject (Oceanside Church of Christ, FL) cited a study where 1600 young men, not members of the Church of Christ, responded to questions about the attire of young women. 85% said bikinis were immodest; 86% said tank tops were immodest.

Exposure of the body and lust are partners. Scantly clad females need to realize that men are not desensitized, no matter how supposedly enlightened or modern their thinking may be. David was not desensitized when he saw Bathsheba bathing. Yes, a lecherous person can lust no matter what

someone is wearing, but who can deny that exposure of the body contributes to attraction that leads to lust? Women need to realize that men are strongly visually stimulated when seeing women in various stages of exposure, whether by scanty attire or skin tight apparel.

Jesus said looking and lusting constituted adultery in the heart (Matt. 5:28). If a woman's attire reveals too much she is also responsible for inciting lascivious thoughts in those who see her. Men bear responsibility for controlling their thoughts and responses to visual stimuli, but women also bear responsibility if they dress in such a way as to invite attention that incites lust. Ladies should be careful not to dress in such a way as to put a stumbling block before men. Contributing to another person stumbling is viewed seriously by God. ***“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believes in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck,***

and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). Paul also underscores the guilt of causing stumbling blocks in 1 Corinthians 8:13, ***“If food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat..”*** The food under consideration was meat offered as sacrifice to idols.

Both men and women should desire to wear clothing at all times that reflects holiness, that reflects that ***“hidden person of the heart”*** (1 Peter 3:4), that strives to live a pure life in the ***“midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”*** (Philippians 2:15). Philip H. Towner in his commentary on Timothy and Titus says, ***“Paul calls on Christian wives (and women in general) to give proof of their claim to godliness (1) by dressing modestly, (2) by living a life characterized by modesty and self-control, and (3) by doing works of Christian service.”*** (p. 210). He also advised in 1

Thessalonians 5:15,” ***...always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.***”

God is concerned about how His children are clothed, both physically and spiritually. He is concerned about the impact that our lives and our attire may have on others. Does my physical attire reflect that I am walking according to the fleshly mind of the world, bowing to and conformed to the culture of the world, or that I am walking according to the direction of the Spirit of God?

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.” (Romans 8:5).

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9).

If figs leaves were not enough when Adam and Eve sinned, can one think he/

she is modest today when parts of the body which were covered by their fig leaf clothing are exposed to public gaze? ***“...let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”*** (2 Corinthians 7:1).

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