

From woman to woman...



The Christian Woman's Clothing

Margaret Elliott



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“What am I going to wear today?” is one of the first questions of the day for many women in the world. Did you know that even God is concerned about what we wear? In the Bible, God does not tell us Christian women exactly what to wear. He does not specify a particular style or uniform that we must wear, but He does give us some guidelines to follow.

We Christian women cannot just accept every new style without examining it. A Christian woman cannot follow blindly the lead of those who have no concern for godly virtues. Remember that the fashion industry will do anything to make money or get into the news. They are masters at appealing to women's desire to be physically beautiful, to be like everybody else and to attract the attention of men. Their emphasis is on the outward appearance. All these things are in opposition to the principles that are written in God's word. Of course, there is no reason that a Christian has to be so completely out of style that she looks like something from another century. Styles change from time to time and from country to country.

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Peter, inspired by God, wrote, *"In like manner, ye wives be in subjection to your own husbands; that, even if any obey not the word, they may without the word be gained by the behavior of their wives; beholding your chaste behavior coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of braiding the hair, and of wearing jewels of gold, or of putting on apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner aforetime the holy women also who hoped in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands: as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose children you now are, if you do well, and are not put in fear by any terror"* (1 Peter 3:1-6).

In Proverbs 31:30, God says, *"Grace is deceitful and beauty is vain; but a woman who feareth Jehovah, she shall be praised."* This is the same standard of exalting inner beauty over outward beauty that Peter is speaking about.

Clothes are not the most important adornment that we are to wear. We are to put more emphasis on subjection, on the state of our hearts, on a meek and quiet spirit and on chaste behavior. These are the things which at all times and in every place will make any woman beautiful. Before God, inner qualities of character are more important than clothing.

When those in authority over us hold high biblical standards, our manner of dress can be a reflection of the degree to which we are in subjection. To be in subjection (or in submission) means to be under the authority of another. It means to obey the desires, directions and orders of another.

The principles of modest dress and inner adornment accompanied by subjection is not something that men dreamed up so they could be over us. These principles are the command of God. God has commanded that a woman's place is to be in subjection. A Christian woman is to be subject to whatever God says in His Word. This includes what he says about subjection and about how to dress. A single young girl is to be subject to her parents, a married woman to her husband, and all women to the church leadership.

There are two important scriptures for women in the New Testament in which God has spoken both about a woman's subjection to man and her dress or adornment in the same context. In 1 Peter 3, He says that one of the ways a married Christian woman is to make herself beautiful is by being in submission to her husband. In 1 Timothy 2, He makes the

connection between a Christian woman's dress and her submission in the church. This means that when church leaders warn against certain types of clothing, she is to heed the warning for her own good and for the good of others. Ephesians 6:1-4 teaches obedience of children to their parents. This includes how a single woman living at home should dress. It means that she must dress according to the judgment of her Christian parents, especially her father.

What kind of clothing can we wear? In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had a problem with clothing. When they sinned, they discovered that they were naked. They made aprons for themselves, but they continued to say they were naked. God agreed. He made them coats of skins to cover their nakedness (Genesis 3:7,10,21). Later in history, God commanded that the altar should not be made with steps because if priests went up steps they would reveal their nakedness (Exodus 20:26). God is concerned about what people wear because he wants nakedness covered.

God, speaking through Paul, says, *"that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety; not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly raiment; but (which becometh women professing godliness) through good works. Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection" (1 Timothy 2:8-11).*

Consider these definitions of these key words:

Modest means not showy, not excessive or extreme, moderate, reserved, orderly, decent, well-arranged, neat, seemly, proper.

Shamefastness means to have a sense of shame that is a part of one's character, that which would prevent one from doing something shameful.

Sobriety carries the meaning of soundness of mind, self-control, soberness, with sound judgment.

These are the guidelines by which we must judge the clothes we wear.

In order to apply these guidelines, it is of utmost importance to understand that God made women and men to be different from each other. He made each sex to be very special in its own way. Because of these differences, each sex has its own particular strengths but also its own particular weaknesses and temptations.

Man, in the matter of sex, is made by God to be attracted easily to a woman through his eyes. This is why merchants, who wish to sell all kinds of items from car brakes to toothpaste, use scantily dressed women to advertise their products and services. Man is made to have strong

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sexual desires and to be easily excited by what he sees of a woman's body. Knowing this, Jesus spoke some strong words in Matthew 5:27-30. He warned men who want to follow God to beware of committing the grave sin of fornication by how they look at women. He also said it so that godly women would know the special temptations of men. Knowing the temptations of men should help women to understand why God wants their nakedness covered.

Some women say, "I can wear what I want to. If men think sexual things about me, it's because they have dirty minds." Of course, there are some men of the world that are going to think sexual things when they look at any woman, no matter what she is wearing. But it is unjust for a woman to say, "Because there are men like that, I can wear whatever I want to and it's the responsibility of men to watch their eyes and mind." To talk like that is to leave the total responsibility of sexual sin on the men. Women who dress provocatively are daring men to not react. It is like waving a red flag in front of a bull and expecting him to ignore it.

The Bible teaches that all Christians, both female and male, have the responsibility to not cause a brother to stumble and fall (Romans 14:13). For this reason, we women carry a heavy responsibility in the matter of the sexual sins of men. If a woman is dressed in a way that calls attention to her body, she carries the burden of causing men to sin. Although she may try to deny it, she is also participating in the sin of any man who falls into the temptation she has placed before his eyes.

We have to realize that what we Christian women wear has great possibilities of danger. The more we reveal of our bodies, the more attention we are calling to our sexual parts. The question is not "What can I get by with wearing?" but rather, "How can I best obey the spirit of God's command to dress modestly with shamefastness and sobriety?"

We must admit that in present day society, concern for the concepts of modesty and shame have been basically lost. In general, girls are no longer taught from childhood to have a sense of shame. Society says, "If you like it, it's right for you." The attitude is not, "How can I be modest?" but rather, "How much can I get away with?" It is no coincidence that the word "daring" is often used with new styles. The attitude today is not, "How can I best cover up my body?" but rather, "How can I best show off my figure?"

Being very concerned for my Christian sisters, I have made a list of

questions based on scriptural principles. I hope this list will help us to fulfill God's commandment to dress "*in modest apparel with shamefastness and sobriety.*" I do not claim to be the final authority on this matter, but I urge you to give these thoughts careful consideration. Read the scriptures again with prayer.

Ask yourself, as a Christian woman, the following questions about the clothing that you already have. Ask yourself these questions before you buy or sew a garment. Also ask the help of your Christian husband or of another Christian woman so they can notice things you can not see yourself. Have him or her look at you wearing the garment to help you see if it conforms to the scriptural principles of modesty, shamefastness and sobriety.

DOES THIS CLOTHING CALL ATTENTION TO MY BODY?

Is it too tight?

The Christian wears clothing to cover and conceal the figure. The tighter the clothing gets, the more the men whistle and stare. This should be enough to make the Christian woman realize that tight clothing is not modest. Some examples of clothing that is too tight are: sweaters that hug the upper portion of the body, many clothes made of knit or stretch material, tight skirts, tight pants. White pants of almost any material allow the outline of the underwear to be seen. Some skirts are so narrow that they require a slit so the wearer can walk. Such a slit says to a man, "Look! and try to see more." The more a man can see of a woman's legs the sexier he considers her to be. Ask yourself these questions:

Does the cloth cling to my body?

Does this clothing make a show of my figure, my hips, my buttocks, my breasts?

Does this clothing show the outline of my underwear?

Does this clothing show my body movements when I walk?

Does this skirt have a slit to make walking easier?

What does this slit reveal of my body?

What happens when I sit down? Does the skirt go above my knees?

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Is it too short?

Certainly God's command about altars with steps in the Old Testament has application to skirts in which a woman cannot sit down modestly (Exodus 20:26). Christian women with a lack of shamefastness continue to embarrass even men in the church by wearing skirts that reveal far too much when they sit down. Revealing the knees and upper legs calls attention to the sexual part of the body that is above them. Men consider upper legs to be sexy. Would you rather be a little out of style or a big stumbling block? Shorts, mini skirts and skirts above the knees are too short. Consider these questions:

Where does the hem of this skirt come to when I stand?

Where does it come to when I sit down?

Can my knees and my legs above my knees be seen from any angle?

Can my knees and upper legs be seen when I am standing or seated?

What can be seen from behind when I bend over?

And what about sleeveless dresses and blouses? These are objectionable on the same grounds as short skirts. Unless the arm holes are so tight that they are uncomfortable, a man has to control his eyes to keep from seeing areas of the upper body that are supposed to be covered up. Anybody wants to wear cooler clothes in hot weather. But hot weather is not a reason for abandoning the principles of modesty and shamefastness. Ask yourself these questions:

Are the sleeves too short or too wide?

When I lift my arm, what can be seen by another person?

Can he see my bra, a part of my breast, or part of my chest under my blouse?

Even with my arm down, is the sleeve inviting a man to look under my clothes?

A blouse that barely comes to the waist or barely covers the bra, tells the men to play peek-a-boo with your body. Any bared midriff style leaves part of your body uncovered that should be covered.

Does this blouse or top reveal the mid-section of my body in any position?

Is the neckline too low or too open?

If you have to hold on to your neck line when you lean over, it is too loose and too low. There are many times when a woman leaning over, especially when she is seated and a man is standing near by, reveals her upper body that is supposed to be covered. God gave women breasts to feed babies, but this does not give a reason for revealing them even at that time, because breasts are also sexually exciting to men. A woman should wear clothing that easily opens to feed the baby without showing her breasts. She should also use a cloth to cover herself when she is doing it in public so she will not be guilty of embarrassing any man.

Even the height or depth of the back neckline is important. A low back neckline means that the whole garment is harder to keep in place. It can slip off the shoulders. A low back neckline reveals more of the body than is necessary. The more a man can see of a woman's body, the more he is tempted to want to see.

There is no exception to covering the body at all times in public. A dress for a special occasion, such as graduation or a wedding, should be judged by the same standards of modesty and shamefastness as everyday wear. Ask yourself these questions:

Does this neckline show a part of my breasts when I sit or stand?

What can others see when I lean over?

Does the neckline reveal more of my body than is necessary in back?

Am I lowering my standard of modesty for a special occasion?

A Christian woman would never appear in public in only her underwear. Or would she? Have you considered that a bathing suit is only specialized, colorful "underwear"? A modern bathing suit not only calls attention to the entire body but it also openly reveals most of it for all to see. Some would use the excuse that it is to be worn for a special occasion and is therefore all right. How can a Christian woman possibly obey the command to be modestly attired with shamefastness while wearing a bathing suit in public?

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Is it too thin?

Clothing is to cover. If it is too thin, it simply does not cover. When God made tunics or coats for Adam and Eve He made them of animal skins. Animal skins are not transparent. If a woman wears an outer piece of clothing which can be seen through, why does she wear it at all? It is far more seductive to wear something which can be seen through than to not wear the item at all. It says to a man, "Try to see the most possible of this body." Clothing that is transparent or like a misty veil is for the bedroom, not for public use. In harmony with 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, a Christian woman not only may but should have in mind attracting her husband in private. But only in private. Your husband needs to be and wants to be attracted sexually to you. But, I repeat, only in private. If you dress this way in public you are tempting other men while attracting your husband.

Cloth that is not exactly transparent is still too thin if the design, color or shade of your underwear shows through in the least. Your brassiere, panties and slip are to cover your womanly sexual parts not accentuate them. They are precisely what they are called, "underwear," and are not to be seen. Note that the older a garment gets, the thinner it gets. Something that was not too thin when it was new may now be too thin because of continual wear. Ask yourself:

Can my underclothes be seen in front or in back through the material?
Does the design of this clothing put emphasis on the sexual parts of my body?

The purpose of the fashion designers is to make women look "sexy" by bold or subtle methods of styling. Stand in front of a large mirror and see that high heels cause the buttocks and the breasts to protrude and therefore be more noticeable. (High heels also do damage to your feet, your back and your internal organs.) Net stockings and stockings with designs or patterns on them call attention to your legs. Ask yourself:

What are the buttons and the decorations of this garment calling attention to?

Are the seams and lines of the garment emphasizing my sexual parts?
What is the general purpose of this particular style?

Have I noticed the reactions of worldly men to feminine apparel that is tight, thin, scant, short and otherwise body revealing?

In the privacy of her bedroom, it is perfectly right and proper for a woman to be dressed in such a way that her husband desires her body (1 Corinthians 7:1-4). This is the proper use of garments that are tight, thin, scant, short and body revealing. However, out in public, many men of the world have no inhibitions about leering at women dressed in such body revealing garments. They stare with the look on their faces which says, "Wow! I wish I dared get my body close to her body." Sometimes their lust comes out with whistles, yells, comments, or horn honking. Matthew 5:28,29 condemns men who look on a woman with the desire to commit adultery with her. When a Christian woman witnesses these things in public she should be embarrassed and disgusted. It should cause her to be even more careful of her own dress so that she will not receive this evil attention and be the cause of men sinning in their hearts. Ask yourself these questions:

Do I want this type of attention?

Do I want to be looked at by men in public in the way that only my husband should be looking at me in our bedroom?

Are men of the world turning and staring at me because of the clothing I wear?

Could it be possible that I am inviting an attack on my body by some man?

Is the clothing I wear causing Christian men to be embarrassed?

Am I causing Christian men to be tempted to sin in their hearts?

DOES THIS CLOTHING CALL ATTENTION TO ITSELF?

Paul, inspired by God, says that when I became a Christian, Christ came to live in me and that He also became my spiritual clothing (Galatians 3:27). Therefore, whatever I say or do, including the clothes I wear, should call attention to Christ. My clothes should not be so outstanding that they call attention to themselves and cause people to forget that I am a Christian.

As a Christian, what should I be announcing?

Is the color too bright?

Is the style too far out from normal?

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Is it going to cause even women to stop and stare?
Will people think I am a Christian if I wear this?
Are people going to think I have Christ living in me?

WHO AM I TRYING TO ADVERTISE?

The Christian life is not one in which we are to try to get by with as much as we can, and still be considered a Christian. Rather it is a life in which we have "*put on Christ*" and have "*Christ living in us*" so that we want to do everything we can to please Him. Read Galatians 3:27; 2:20; 1 Corinthians 10:31 and Proverbs 31:30. 1 Peter 3:1-6 says that having inner godly qualities is the way to call attention to ourselves. Ask yourself these questions:

Am I trying to advertise myself or Christ?
Am I trying to make myself physically beautiful to call attention to myself?
Does this clothing hide my inner Christian qualities?

DOES THIS CLOTHING MAKE ME APPEAR TO BE SOMETHING I AM NOT?

To appear to be one person on the outside while you are a different person on the inside is hypocritical. A Christian woman should dress so that people can tell she is a Christian. If she dresses in outlandish styles or in unisex styles, people will wonder why she says she is a Christian. To dress like a man is to say, "I'm ashamed that God made me a woman." God does not say to conceal the fact that we are women, but to dress as women with modesty, shamefastness and sobriety. Ask yourself these questions:

Does it make me look like a man?
Is it a "unisex" style that makes me look like neither a woman nor a man?
Does it make me look like a harlot?
Does it make me look like a neon sign or a clown?
Does it make me look like a Christian woman should look?

AM I AFRAID TO BE DIFFERENT FROM THE WORLD?

The changing styles in clothes is a business of the world with the purpose of making money. Notice that the designer's emphasis is not the emphasis of God's word. Designers speak of the clothes they want to sell as "sexy," "elegant," "brings out your figure," and "daring." Don't fall into their trap. Romans 12:1,2 says that Christians are not to be conformed to the world. James 4:4 says that friendship with the world is hatred toward God. 1 John 2:15-17 tells us not to love the things of the world. The best style for you is the one that suits you as an individual Christian woman who places emphasis on pleasing God rather than being like everyone else. Ask yourself prayerfully:

What do the clothing designers say about this style?

Which is most important: Christ or to dressed in the latest style?

WHY AM I BUYING OR MAKING THIS CLOTHING?

Both 1 Peter 3:3 and 1 Timothy 2:9 teach that a Christian woman is not to wear costly clothing. One garment is costly if the price exceeds good sense in the use of money. However, a woman who has a closet jammed full of second-hand, rummage sale clothes has spent far too much on clothes. Some women are addicted to clothes. They need to realize that to set their hearts on having a great many clothes is not right (Matthew 6:31-33). Some women think that if someone else has certain clothes, they must have them too (1 Timothy 6:6-8). They do not even consider whether such clothes are suitable for them or not (1 Timothy 6:8-10). Sometimes other needs of the family are neglected by their constant purchase of clothes. If you have many in season clothes that hang in your closet for weeks without being worn, you have too many clothes. Consider the needs of the poor instead of your selfish desires (Matthew 19:21; Galatians 2:10). Clear out your closet and determine to use these questions to help you have more control over your wardrobe.

Will it serve a useful purpose?

Do I really need this?

Although it has a low, rummage sale price, would it be wise to buy it?

Am I putting too much emphasis on clothing?

Am I buying it just because someone else has it?

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Have I remembered the needs of the poor?
Should I use this money to buy other important things for my family?
Does the style fit into my style of life?
When would I wear it?

HOW DOES THIS CLOTHING REFLECT MY ATTITUDE OF SUBJECTION?

Subjection means to be submissive, to give obedience. A Christian woman must be in subjection to God, to the church, and to her husband or her father (if she lives in his home). If these authorities disapprove of certain clothing, she must obey. Even if the church leaders and her husband or father pay no attention to what she wears, she should have a submissive attitude toward what the Bible teaches. Ask yourself these questions:

Has my husband or father or the church directly opposed this type of garment?
Will I be in subjection if I wear this clothing, knowing that they disapprove?
Will others think I have a "gentle and quiet spirit" if I wear this clothing?
Is my attitude rebellious or submissive toward what the Bible teaches?

It is my prayer that God will bless you and help you to be the kind of woman that is dressed to please Him and who lives according to what the Bible teaches!

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