

# Put On Some Clothes!

**In an age of low-cut jeans and near-naked pop stars, Christians need to bring some sanity to the way America is dressing.**

Nearly 90 million viewers turned on their televisions to watch the 38th annual Super Bowl game in February. No doubt many of them expected to see only star-studded performances by popular singers during the halftime show. What they saw in addition was a three-second glimpse of singer Janet Jackson's breast when Justin Timberlake ripped her costume at the end of their routine.

The Jackson-Timberlake debacle initiated a storm of criticism in the public arena over indecency on television. Whether the exposure was intentional or caused by a "wardrobe malfunction," as first claimed, the incident has led to bills being passed by both houses of Congress increasing fines against broadcasters that violate decency standards.

A similar storm over immodesty is brewing in the body of Christ. For many, the sensual, skimpy, low-cut, too-short, revealing clothes worn by believers is causing much alarm.

Last year, when a well-known female preacher arrived at a Pentecostal conference wearing an extremely tight dress, leaders of the group apologized to attendees and promised, "She will never preach here again." And when a young woman visited a church near Atlanta, she was surprised to find the pastor and many of the church's male leaders dressed in sexy-looking, tight muscle shirts.

"I left because I struggled with lust in the past, and I didn't want to take myself through that again," the woman explained.

One Florida pastor, frustrated about immodest dress among his

congregants, confronted the problem during Sunday morning worship. "When you wear your clothes tight and too short, you're making a statement about yourself. My advice to you is, 'If you are not for sale, please take the sign down!'"

Recently, Charisma spoke with ministry leaders about the need for modesty among believers. They say churches must be willing to address the issue if Christians are to be lights that reflect the purity of Christ.

## **Worldly Influences**

Madeline Crabb, author of a training manual for churches, titled Dressing to Please God: Clothing the Mind, Body and Spirit, is familiar with inappropriate clothing worn by believers. The author was prompted to address the issue after noticing the steady shift among Christians toward wearing revealing clothes.

"God wants women to be without excuse, and He wants Christians to know what is expected of them," Crabb, 54, told Charisma.

A licensed minister, the author has participated in or held at least 200 women's shows or workshops. During the years, she has taught women how to dress and how to conceal their flaws to look more attractive and presentable.

Her experience helped shape her core message: Modesty is humility expressed in proper dress, and anything other than that is compromise.

"The world has a hard time believing the church," Crabb says. "We use a lot of religious mumbo jumbo about how, as Christians, we have grace and freedom. And then we make statements about how the world doesn't understand us. ... The church doesn't understand the parameters God has given."

Though her message is unpopular at times, the Bloomington, Indiana, resident hopes Christians will listen.

But many believers, particularly young ones, aren't turned off by immodest dress. In fact, they are some of the worst offenders. Why? Because they are influenced by the world around them.

Today, more than ever, kids get a megadose of sexual content every time they turn on the television, according to Focus on the Family. Other research indicates that when children as young as 7, 8 and 9 watch pop divas and gangster rappers in the media they become desensitized to the message of modesty.

It isn't solely the fault of the performers. Recording companies sometimes put tremendous pressure even on Christian performing artists to compromise. Take the popular group Out of Eden, for example.

This group burst onto the music scene five albums ago, and throngs of listeners have collectively purchased more than half a million of their recordings. But according to the group's members—sisters Lisa Kimmey, Danielle Kimmey and Andrea Kimmey-Baca—some record companies won't do business with them and other singers who refuse to show lots of skin.

"Companies don't understand us not wanting to show off our bodies except to our husbands," Kimmey-Baca told Cross Rhythms magazine. "They don't understand that God has called us to be role models. ... We want to sing about sexual purity."

There are some signs that our society still appreciates modesty, however. John Stossel of ABC's 20/20 challenged fashion designers who create sexy clothes for young girls, especially 8- to 12-year-olds. Since designers already are making sexy clothing for young girls, what would they design for prostitutes, Stossel wanted to know.

But not enough people are asking that question. That's undoubtedly one reason Mother Barbara McCoo Lewis, who oversees women in more than 250 churches in Southern California for the Church of God in Christ, stresses how

important it is for Christians to be models of modesty in our fallen world.

“The principles of holiness, which include modesty, must not be assumed but rather imparted in a spirit of love and patience,” the Los Angeles resident explained. In an effort to help women adopt a godly lifestyle, Mother Lewis started Daughters of Ruth and Naomi, a mentorship program that mainstreams younger women into every area of ministry and encourages spiritual maturity through positive reinforcement.

“Modesty is better caught than taught!” she says.

### **Hemlines and the Heart**

For many pastors battling immodesty in the church, the debate goes much deeper than hip-hugger jeans and belly blouses. Many of them say it's purity of heart that is most at stake. They attribute the downward turn toward unprecedented indecency to a society saturated with sexual content in every medium: music, television, advertisements and movies.

The steady dose of immodesty, research indicates, is shaping society's perception of reality and, ultimately, its spirituality. Bob Lepine, known to Christian radio listeners across the country as the co-host of the popular daily radio program FamilyLife Today with Dennis Rainey, says immodesty is a fast-growing problem in the body of Christ and that the church must be wise in its attempt to address it.

“This issue is a matter of the heart, not legalism,” Lepine says.

Like Lepine, there are leaders who are taking their chances despite what believers might say. Pastors are teaching congregants that men and women and young girls and boys should dress in a manner reflecting Christ-likeness, not the culture. They use passages in the Bible such as 1 Timothy 2:9-10 as the standard.

“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” (KJV).

C.J. Mahaney of Sovereign Grace Ministries says any discussion about modesty begins with the heart, not the hemline. According to Mahaney, what a woman wears “will demonstrate that she lives with a settled resistance to the ceaseless pull of the world.”

In a teaching addressing the topic, Mahaney goes on to say: “I choose to believe that most Christian women who dress immodestly are not intentionally promoting immorality. Some are no doubt failing to exercise sufficient wisdom and diligence.”

The ministry offers a “heart check” for Christians to check their motives for dressing in a particular manner. Questions include:

What statements am I making with the clothes I wear?

Does my clothing satisfy me, or does it please God?

Is what I wear a reflection of the Word of God, self-control and appropriate attire, or do I identify with popular culture and worldliness in the way I dress?

What standard do I use when selecting clothing—society’s standard or the Bible?

### **Taking the Modesty Test**

When Dannah Gresh accepted the Holy Spirit’s prompting to minister to teenagers, she had no idea it meant teaching girls about their “secret weapon.” In her book, *Secret Keeper: The Delicate Power of Modesty* (Moody Press), Gresh lovingly but firmly warns girls about their God-given power.

“If you’re a young woman, you were born with the seed of this power planted firmly within you,” Gresh writes. “This power is

unique to us girls—it is your allure,” she explains.

Gresh’s simple yet thought-provoking message about an often misunderstood principle is disarming. When this mother of two children—Lexi, 10, and Rob, 13—took her husband’s advice to address the issue of immodesty in the church and in secular settings, she quickly learned that Christians desperately need to confront the problem.

Gresh told Charisma there can be dangerous consequences for girls who wear sensual, revealing clothing. She cites organizations such as The Medical Institute for Sexual Health. According to the institute, several factors place girls at risk for future problems.

Gresh says: “One of the top five risk factors is a girl appearing older than she actually is. She does this by the way she dresses and presents herself.”

The author says girls don’t realize it, but they reveal their special gift from God—a gift intended solely for their husbands—when they wear clothing that accentuates curves and other parts of their bodies. She says boys who used to struggle with pornography on the Internet now face temptation when they go to youth groups because girls are dressing more provocatively.

In an effort to arm believers with the tools to live godly lives, Dannah and her husband, Bob, started Pure Freedom () with the purpose of “equipping men and women of all ages to live vibrant lives of purity, to experience healing from past impurity and to help couples have vibrant, godly marriages.” The Greshes’ message is connecting with hundreds of thousands of American youth. The couple facilitates about 25 youth conferences annually and are scheduled to train ministries in Zambia to use their curriculum to fight the AIDS pandemic.

For one girl, 16, ministries such as Pure Freedom help because they “do not place people in bondage with manmade rules that

will never be embraced.”

After receiving numerous requests for guidelines to help teens dress in modest fashion, Gresh developed the Truth or Bare? Modesty Test, which she uses to offer simple solutions to clothing problems. Gresh says girls can determine for themselves if clothes are modest or not.

“It’s to help a girl to go through the thinking process by herself and let her heart be molded into modesty rather than face a legalistic set of rules,” she says. There are seven Truth or Bare? tests, including:

**Spring Valley.** To determine if a shirt or a blouse is too tight, the girl should “take the tips of her fingers and press into the shirt where the ribs come together in the ‘valley’ in the middle of the chest.” Gresh says if the shirt “springs” back when the fingers are removed, the shirt is too tight. Her solution: “Get rid of the shirt. It’s not going to get bigger overnight.”

**Raise & Praise.** If a girl wants to know if she is revealing her belly, Gresh advises her to extend her arms and hands as far as she can in a gesture of worshiping God. If the movements reveal any skin, the young lady is encouraged to purchase a “secret weapon,” a ribbed T-shirt or tank top from the men’s department. The tee should be worn under the shorter shirt and tucked into shorts or pants.

**Mirror Image.** To see if a skirt or shorts are too short, Gresh suggests sitting on the floor with legs crossed, Indian style. If too much thigh or undergarments are visible, she says, it’s too short. She tells girls to go for “extremely long, extremely full but not extremely short” skirts. For shorts, she encourages girls to “keep looking” for just the right length.

**Plumber’s Test.** Want to know if your pants are too low? In reference to the popular low-rider jeans, Gresh suggests that

you sit Indian-style on the floor, bend forward as far as you can and then, “reach behind and get a feel of what might be the featured view if your jeans are too low.” She tells girls, “Find a pair that won’t cause viewers to blush for you.”

Gresh says she offers tests to girls because she knows they don’t want to intentionally lure guys. She believes it is her responsibility to teach biblical truths in a way that won’t turn people off from the message and from the church.

“A lot of people just don’t know that purity and modesty are reflections of the heart of God. This is not about rules that place people in bondage. I believe as Christians, the body of Christ should live and dress in such a manner that people want to get to know God.”

### **Just Say NO to Janet**

You don’t have to take your style cues from Janet Jackson, MTV or legalistic saints. Here’s how to make fashion sense.

**DO:** Wear fashionable, modest clothing. The Bible doesn’t say you have to look like a prude.

**DON’T:** Wear form-fitting, tight clothes. By doing so you cause others to take their eyes off God to look at you.

**DO:** Wear clothes that complement your body type. Look for clothing stores that carry styles with your figure in mind.

**DON’T:** Expose flesh that should be reserved for your mate’s eyes only. This means covering cleavage so you aren’t tempting someone of the opposite sex. Don’t let your underwear peek out of pants or tops.

**DO:** Wear clothes that represent your God-given sense of personal style.

**DON’T:** Let people convince you that it’s wrong to wear certain colors. Remember, God made the rainbow!

**DO:** Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help you select clothing that honors Him.

**DON'T:** Allow a church's or denomination's set of legalistic, unbiblical rules (such as "no pants" or "no short hair") create an atmosphere of spiritual bondage for you.

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