

When Modesty Is Hot: How Much Skin Before It's Sin?

How much skin can a girl show before it's a sin? Modesty can be a sticky subject, even among Christians.

But experts say being modest doesn't mean a woman can't let her beauty shine.

In fact, that's the point.

If you look around, it's easy to think modesty is dead. Everywhere we look images tell us less is more, and the pressure for young girls to look sexy has never been more potent.

"I know that the reason most girls dress like that is because they're trying to get attention from boys," Stephanie Perry, a 9th-grader from Virginia, told CBN News.

CBN News met Stephanie at an event at Oneighty DC Youth Ministry designed to show young girls that modesty is hot.

Modest Is Hottest

"It all has to do with beauty, but beauty should really come from the inside out," explained Jaime Jamgochian, a worship leader and the creator of Modest is Hottest.

"Unfortunately, the generation that we're living in says the less you wear, the more hot and beautiful you are. But there's something really beautiful to mystery," she said.

Jamgochian never dreamed she'd be preaching demureness. But she said if you look around, even in the church, you'll see it's needed.

"I didn't come to know the Lord until I was much older; I was

21,” she shared. “I didn’t grow up in youth groups or doing any of that so when I began growing in Christ and knowing Jesus, I realized ‘Wow, why are we dressing the same way I used to dress in the clubs?’” she said.

Michelle McGraw, a leader at Oneighty DC, agreed.

“Instead of kind of throwing the rule book at them, it’s sort of a way of explaining—it’s out of love, you know. You love the Lord; He loves you and so this is sort of how you respond—with modesty,” she told CBN News.

Defining Modesty

So what is modesty? We took that question to Dannah Gresh, a mother of two girls and founder of Secret Keeper Girl, a ministry that travels the country teaching girls and their moms about modesty and why it’s important.

She’s also written books about modesty and knows it can be controversial, even in the church.

“You know, that’s an interesting topic,” she said. “If you look at the Scriptures, modesty is self-control and how you present yourself externally so that people can see your heart. The Bible teaches that our primary role, the reason we’re on this planet, is to glorify God.”

“Any time we dress immodestly or we dress to show off our bodies, we’re bringing glory to ourselves,” Gresh explained. “That’s the greatest, I think, sin of immodesty, is that we’re saying, ‘Look at me’ instead of ‘Look at God.’”

The tough thing is that there aren’t any exact rules.

“God didn’t spell it out in black and white for us. Instead He’s asked us to search with our hearts,” Gresh said.

The Secret Keeper Girl and Modest is Hottest programs offer girls fashion tips to help them be modest while still

showcasing their personal style.

During the Modest is Hottest event, Jamgochian told the girls they shouldn't read their Bibles and then go out looking like a "hoochie momma momma," a remark that drew roaring laughter.

Gresh said she felt compelled to focus on teaching modesty when she came across research by the Medical Institute for Sexual Health that indicates one of the top factors that puts a young person at risk for an early sexual debut is appearing or dressing to look older.

And it's increasingly harder for girls to resist the urge. Companies now market adult garments and products to extremely young girls.

"Some of the products in the last few years that have been sold to 8-, 9-, 10-, 11-year-old girls have been push-up bras, thong underwear called eye-candy, and eyeliner and mascara," Gresh said.

"In the last three years, eyeliner and mascara sales for 10-year-olds have doubled," she added. "Why is there anything to double?"

Gresh said that if girls can be reached before age 12 and taught modesty, it can change the trajectory of their lives by putting them on a pathway to purity.

What About Men?

So what about boys and men? The Bible doesn't offer any modesty instructions for them. Gresh suggests it's because men are much more vulnerable to the beauty of women than women are to the physical allure of men.

"The way that a man treats a woman is entirely his responsibility, period," Gresh said. "However, a woman is called to exemplify the fruit of the Spirit. One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control, and I think we need to be able

to exemplify that in the way that we dress and the way that we present ourselves.”

Does that mean men have no responsibility to be modest?

“Well, sure, men have a responsibility, and I wish we could get some dudes to start talking about that. The Abercrombie guy is so naked,” she said, laughing.

“I think men have the same responsibility for us to be able to see their good works, for us to be able to see the inner qualities and strengths that God has put in them, not their bodies,” he said.

If we all wake up every day focused on honoring and glorifying God, then we’ll all dress appropriately, Gresh said.

Jamgochian admonished young girls: If you’re not sure what to wear, just ask your parents.

“It isn’t in what the billboard says you need to look like,” she said. “It isn’t in being a size 2 or a size 10; it’s in being who God made you to be. It’s in accepting that you are fearfully and truly wonderfully made by Him regardless of what society says.”