

With Summer Approaching, What Apparel is Appropriate for Women?

Short shorts? Bikinis? Sprayed on yoga pants? Does it really matter as temperatures rise and summer starts?

I recently read three tweets I'm sure will ignite some interesting debate. We really do need to get ahead of this before the pool parties and picnics start.

As parents, my wife and I raised four. We now have seven grandchildren, so I'm well aware this is usually an area where clear-cut godly guidance is essential.

- "Dear sisters, as summer approaches, it is so important to be mindful of your clothing choices. Please prioritize dressing modestly in the fear of God, and being considerate of your brothers in Christ."
- "Acceptable occasions to wear yoga pants? How about alone in your house with your husband. Working out alone in your private gym. No public venues or social media."
- "Bikinis are closer to nudity than swimwear. Women, please cover-up—especially Christian women. Sisters, be mindful of the conscience of your brothers in the Lord. If you cause your brother to sin, you played a part."

Are these unreasonable perspectives? Are they biblical? We can avoid legalism and it really does matter.

6 Scriptural Guidelines

Scripture clearly reveals the direction Jesus gave us to never "look on a woman to lust after her" (Matt. 5:28) and Psalm 101:3 tells us, "I will set no wicked thing before my eyes." What follows are six guidelines pertinent to women, but having

application for men as well.

- We are to “Present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is [our] reasonable service of worship ... [and] “not be conformed to this world [pop culture] but be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind[s]” (Rom. 12:1-2a).

We should look sharp, not seductive. We can dress cool without appearing cheap. Let’s draw attention to our countenance and eyes (which Jesus said are the “lamp of the body,” as opposed to body parts and flesh that often show where a person’s heart and focus really are). Let’s not rationalize either (“I get a better tan line, and guys shouldn’t be looking anyway”).

- We know that we should never wear clothing that draws lustful looks, causing others to “stumble” into sin (see Matt. 18:6) or commit adultery in their heart by fantasizing after viewing us dressed provocatively or immodestly (Matt. 5:28), as in wearing a swimsuit akin to walking around in revealing underwear. Let’s get real: Is some beach attire a bathing suit, or almost a birthday suit? We must not allow ourselves to become desensitized to the message of modesty today.
- Modesty is a positive principle emphasizing inner beauty and character over outward vanity and cheapness. “I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly” (1 Tim. 2:9a, NASB). Sprayed-on yoga pants or see-through, bra-less blouses don’t get a thumbs-up here.

Helpful Definitions

“Proper”: Suitable, appropriate, conforming to an acceptable standard, decent.

“Modest”: Having a regard for decencies of behavior or dress, not displaying one’s body.

“Discreet”: Lacking ostentation (showiness); showing good judgment.

- In the Garden of Eden, before sin entered into the world, the man and his wife were both naked (the Hebrew word speaks of partial covering, covered by God’s glory, see Gen. 2:25); after they sinned, the effect was shame, so they covered up (Gen. 3:7). This is why we naturally feel self-conscious about body parts revealed; we fold arms under breasts, clasp hands in front of our lower anatomy when standing before a group.
- No matter how alluring and supposedly happy certain divas, models and Hollywood superstars appear, don’t be fooled. God tells us: “Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain but the woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised” (Prov. 31:30). Behind closed doors, many of these “picture-perfect” (and computer-enhanced, surgically altered) people are, in reality, lonely, jaded and empty. They flit from romance to romance and therapist to therapist; “on the outside they appear beautiful but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (Matt. 23:27, NASB). Pray for them!
- We are “called to be free. But do not use [our] freedom to indulge the flesh [our sinful nature]; rather, serve one another humbly in love” (Gal. 5:13, NIV). In other words, we have the privilege and the ability to defer to, rather than defraud, the opposite sex through sensuality.

More Definitions

“Defer”: Limiting my freedom in order not to offend those God allows me to serve (see Rom. 14:21).

“Defraud”: Arousing sexual desires in another person that cannot be righteously satisfied” (see 1 Thess.4:6).

“Sensuality”: Planned appeal to the physical senses for

physical gratification (see 1 Pet. 2:11).

Let's ask: Who dictates my wardrobe—worldly magazines, movies and models, or the Word of God, which calls me to be (as a woman): 1. Feminine 2. Modest 3. Appropriate?

Here's the Deal: When there is a question raised (by yourself, a parent or a faithful friend) concerning an article of clothing, length of a skirt, level of a neckline, tightness of pants, message on a shirt, follow the following:

- Doubt—do without (Rom. 14:13).
- “Flee from youthful lusts” (2 Tim. 2:22a, NASB).
- “Honor your father and your mother” (Eph. 6:2a).

Let's help our young women learn to discern the deception of pop culture advocating “empowerment.” Remember, modest attire starts in the heart, not a dress code. Let's focus on the abundant life Jesus promised. {eo}

For more on this topic, watch this four-minute video.