

MODESTY



What does 'modesty' mean? Is it about how we dress? Or behave? Is it the words we use? Or the online profile we put out to the world?

Or, is it a word that we shouldn't even use in this time and age?

Is it only for girls? Or is there an acceptable standard of modesty for boys also?

A biblical definition of modesty must focus on the heart and mind. It has to question our motivations rather than take a legalistic view of behaviour. In addition, it is about wisdom and discernment. Is what we do and wear, how we behave, or how we project ourselves in social media done with an awareness of the effect this has on others? Or on the culture and environment?

For both boys and girls, there are two sides to modesty.

The first is to look at the choice you are making and consider whether it is a God-honouring use of your body.

Remember: Christ died for *you*—your body, and the bodies of all those around you, all belong to Jesus. Below are some helpful verses from the Bible to give some further context.

1 Corinthians 6:15 says, 'Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?' And in verses 19-20, 'Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you

have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.'

And, Jesus wants *you* to worship *him* with your body.

Romans 12:1b says, '... offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.'

When you understand the message of these verses above, you know that living by the world's standards of worth, beauty and sexiness in dress, behaviour, social media trends or any other area is actually slavery. The choices you make in Christ should be based on freedom from a worldly definition of beauty and worth, and motivated by a hatred of sin and a desire to draw attention to God.

The second is to evaluate whether your action of dress, behaviour or social media profile could possibly cause a fellow Christian brother or sister to be tempted to act in a non-God-honouring way.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says, 'Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak' (1 Corinthians 8:9).

Although he is writing about eating food sacrificed to an idol, I believe the same principle could be applied to what we wear, how we behave or how we present ourselves on social media.



The Covenant Eyes article referenced at the end of this article defines modesty as: *'a respectable manner of adorning one's body and carrying oneself, born out of a freedom from a worldly definition of beauty and worth, and motivated by a hatred of sin and a desire to draw attention to God'*.

When we consider this definition, we see that true modesty is about freedom, not repression. A freedom from the norms and expectations of the world, both in how we dress and how we behave.

This is a freedom to be countercultural and live as we are called to live as children of God, not as slaves of the world.

As Christians we are free from the slavery of sin because we are united with Christ. Paul exhorts us to live out this freedom: 'do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires' (Romans 6:12). When it comes to modest dress and behaviour, we can follow Paul's next statement quite literally: 'Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness' (v 13). Paul wants Christian men and women to have self-mastery in their wardrobe choices and behaviour, to be totally free from worldly ways of defining worth, beauty and sexiness.

There is another side to modesty. It is about being aware of the effect our behaviour has on our Christian brothers and sisters. Something that is acceptable by cultural norms may be a temptation to lust to a brother or sister in Christ. This may be in the way we dress, but it could also be behaviours such as the language we use, the social media profile we have, the friends we choose or our role models. If these or other behaviours portray a lifestyle of worldly values we are in danger of tempting others to sin. 1 Peter 3:3–4 is a helpful reference point, explaining that pursuing a godly character is more valuable than external beauty.

As a parent or carer, here are some questions you could use when choosing clothes with your child. Ask the child:

- Why did you pick these particular clothes?
- Can you join in all the fun sports and activities you like to do without worrying about your clothes if you choose these?
- Will these clothes be out of place in the setting you wear them? What will others be wearing?
- How would you feel if someone else wore these clothes?
- Do the clothes cover the parts of your body that you don't want others to look at?

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Below are some references to help you understand and deal with these issues:

- Meggie Cottonethal, 2017, 'Modesty misunderstood', *Desiring God*, May 20, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/modesty-misunderstood>
- Luke Gilkerson, 2013, '6 marks of biblical modesty: How God brings sexy back', *Covenant Eyes*, August 16, <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2013/08/16/biblical-definition-of-modesty/>

