I heard this phrase being used recently, and it got me thinking about how in the present day evil is so often put for good, and good for evil (Isaiah 5:20). In our modern 'culture', all Godly attributes are scorned, with the notion of modest dress often being simply laughed at. In this article I will consider why Christians should separate themselves from the world, and will make the case for modest dress.

The statement that has been taken as the title of this article encourages the practice of two sins: Pride, and immodesty - which are very similar in nature, the latter being an outward manifestation of the former.

Pride is one of the most basic, underestimated, and damaging of sins. It is often said that the root of Adam's fall was pride, and it has caused immense damage to countless men and women.

Whilst pride is essentially something in the mind, it is manifested outwardly in different ways. Someone may be known to be proud by the way they speak or the way they act. Immodesty is one of the indicators of inward pride/vanity. The Bible says that women should dress modestly, with 1 Timothy 2:9 stating "...that women adorn themselves in modest apparel...". Immodesty, as the prefix 'im' dictates, is the lack of modesty - a rejection of humility and decency in favour of the flaunting or boasting of a certain attribute of one's self. The label 'Immodest' could be used in many different ways, and could refer to many different things that one may be being immodest about; but in this article I will use it in the context of clothing, as this was the context that I heard the phrase "If you've got it - flaunt it" being used in recently.

All Christians should know that how we present ourselves to the world (and indeed, to each other) is of utmost importance. Any Christian who lives out their faith will know that many unbelievers are continually on the look out for an area in which to criticise the conduct of the Christian. It is also a fact that people form an opinion on others within a very short time of meeting them. Depending on which report you read, the opinion can start to be formed in as little as 10 seconds, and for up to around 1 minute! And first impressions are hard to break. Therefore, how Christians present themselves, as well as how they act is critical, lest we should give cause to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme His holy Name (2 Samuel 12:14). If the Bible says one thing, or gives one set of standards; and we do another, what will our enemies say?
Modesty Generally Considered

The word 'modest' does not appear to be defined in scripture, in as far as we do not appear to be given any hard-and-fast rules as to exactly what constitutes modest dress. Yet, for the most part it should be incredibly clear in the mind of the Christian as to what is modest and what is not: Modest clothing should actually cover one's self, and should be designed to avoid indecency and sin, whether in thought or deed. It should be painfully obvious therefore that dress which reveals inordinate amounts of flesh is immodest (here I particularly have in mind low cut tops, and dresses/shorts that finish above the knee).

Another aspect to consider is which parts of the body clothing draws attention to. A woman may have fully 'covered' her flesh, but if the clothing is tight-fitting and draws attention to her figure, she can hardly be said to be dressed in a modest fashion. Sadly, if modern clothing is not 'low-cut', or does not otherwise expose lots of flesh, it is often tight-fitting, revealing the woman's figure to men, and provoking them to think sinfully.

At this juncture, I know that many will jump up and shout, "Hang on a sec, it isn't my fault if someone looks at me with lust - that's the man's problem, not mine". Although this retort is often said with a great deal of indignation, parts of it are indeed true - we cannot control the minds of others. However, although a woman cannot stop a man from looking at her lustfully, she can choose what it is that he sees when he looks at her. If a man sees a woman that has taken care to be moderate, it will be far harder for him to think with lust. If there are any Christian women who disagree with what I am saying here, you have to ask yourselves: In flaunting yourselves, are you happy to be the very object of sin and therefore be complicit in that same sin? Remember, "...whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart"

( Matthew 5:28 ). Can Christian women really be happy to provoke men to look upon them in this way?

I would also argue that modesty works both ways, and that men should also take heed as to how they present themselves to women. One of the phrases that I see coming up very frequently in many of the Christian arguments for female modesty is something along the lines of "men are visual creatures". This is indeed true - there are many Biblical examples of men holding female beauty as a virtue, and there are many examples of women that are deemed to
be very beautiful (think of Abraham's wife, Sarah, who he said was his sister in fear for his life, because she was beautiful). Yet, these same Christian arguments often say that women are entirely different to men in this regard, and are not as visually stimulated as males. However, it is clear that women are not as unprovoked as is sometimes argued. I hate to break it to some, but women are also stimulated visually! Therefore, although the Biblical emphasis is on women dressing modestly, I would argue that whatever general principles the Bible lays down on the matter, the same also apply for men. I will elaborate on this point after considering some key Biblical texts.

No Biblical Guidance?

Having briefly considered why modesty is commanded by God, and His purposes for doing so, we may be left wondering whether the Bible goes to any lengths to define how we (both men and women) should dress. Is it simply up to each individual's interpretation, or does the Bible give us any clues?

It may be helpful to start in the beginning, and look at Genesis. After Adam and Eve sinned, they became aware of their nakedness, and tried to hide it. The last verse of Genesis 2 tells us that before the serpent beguiled Eve, both man and woman were naked, and were not ashamed. Yet, after their fall, they became aware of their nakedness, and sought to hide it. After the LORD judged the man, the woman, and the serpent; and after He gave the first gospel message, God Himself made clothing for Adam and Eve. The reason for doing so is simple: It was to cover their nakedness:

Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them. (Genesis 3:21)

'Clothed' contains connotations of 'wrapping around' - it was given as a covering, not as an adornment.

Secondly, let us look at one of God's commandments concerning the nature of clothing:

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God. (Deuteronomy...
Here, the LORD says - in no uncertain terms - that men and women are to dress differently. Today, the distinctions between the genders are being eroded by people with evil agendas, and the idea of 'unisex' clothing has been around for longer than I have been alive, although it is still a modern invention. The term was coined in the 1960s, a time of immense social upheaval, and the beginning of the wholesale rejection of all that is good and holy.

But, in Deuteronomy God says that this notion is utterly abhorrent to Him - it is abomination. Therefore, what God condemns, Christians should flee from. We are exhorted to "be not conformed to this world" (`Romans 12:2`), and to "come out from among them [the world], and be ye separate" (`2 Corinthians 6:17`).

It is for this reason that men are not to wear skirts, as well as the fact that (to echo Paul's phrase in 1 Corinthians 11) nature itself teaches us that it is wrong. Thankfully this is still largely unacceptable to most people today (Although, a day after writing this, I saw [this story](#)). Yet, what of women wearing trousers (or, as the Americans call them, *Pants*)? Many - particularly in the UK where the women's modesty movement is not as large as it is in the US - will react incredulously at me saying so, but I argue that it is better for women to wear dresses. Doesn't *nature itself* show that they are more feminine?

It is a fact that 100 years ago you would be extremely hard-pressed to find a woman wearing trousers. It was almost unheard of, and only feminists wore them. A prominent example is Elizabeth Smith Miller, who was an advocate of 'Women's Dress Reform'[^2] - an ideology that has ultimately given rise to the highly immodest 'mini-skirt' of today. In scripture, the word 'trouser'
doesn't appear, but the nearest term is 'breeches', and whenever the word is mentioned, it is always with reference to male clothing.

Lest anyone should think that I am mad, or just making things up to suit a peculiar fringe Christian position, let us interrogate 1 Timothy 2:9 more fully:

[9] In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;
[10] But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

The word 'apparel' today means any item of clothing - something put on by a person. Yet, the meaning of the Greek word translated into English as 'apparel' is a little different. The word is 'katastole', and it is only used once in scripture. It is a compound word deriving from 'kata'

' (in this context meaning 'down') and 'stello'

' (to set). Vine's Expository Dictionary defines 'katastole'

' thus:

"to send or let down, to lower" (kata, "down," stello, "to send"), was primarily a garment let down; hence, "dress, attire," in general

Some argue that Paul was here instructing women to wear dresses of a modest nature, because dresses are 'let down' (as katastole implies), whereas trousers, or breeches are pulled up. The word translated 'modest' is kosmios

(from kosmos ), which Strong defines as meaning orderly, and of good behaviour. So in a strictly literal sense, 1 Timothy 2:9 says that women should wear respectable, orderly dresses.
Having said this, I'm not sure that it could be argued that scripture demands a blanket ban on trousers/shorts for women (as I can think of a few occasions when dresses may be inconvenient), though I would argue that dresses are more feminine. I think that there are really three areas that Christian women should consider about their dress:

(1) It should be feminine
(2) It should cover the flesh (ie chest, midriff, thighs, etc)
(3) It should not draw attention (which is what 'shamefacedness' appears to refer to in 1 Timothy 2:9 - it is the act of being humble) to a woman's shape by being tight-fitting. Rather, the attention should be on the woman's face and who she is as a person, rather than on parts of her body, which turns her into a sexual object in the minds of many men.

Self Esteem

One view on why so many young women dress immodestly is that, because of the nature of modern culture, they have low self esteem. As I stated in point 3 of the previous section, many men do view women as sexual objects. I was not brought up in a Christian home, and I have seen and heard the way many (and I mean the majority) of young men today think about women. The warped view of women held by many men is evident in the coarse language that is so commonly used amongst men, where the woman is described as 'that', or 'it' - as an object to gratify the man's lusts rather than as a person. This kind of talk is common amongst men today, where Godliness has been all but eroded completely. Ironically, this warped view of women has developed alongside, and arguably as a consequence of feminism.

But whether the reason for immodest dress is self esteem or not, surely Christian women can do better than attempting to attract men by presenting themselves as objects? To the Christian woman, I would echo Matthew Henry, who warned:

"There is not a surer presage of ruin than an unhumbled heart under humbling providences. Let painted faces look in Jezebel's glass, and see how they like themselves."

4 Is the immodesty and penchant for wearing heavy make-up a means to receiving more male attention, to boost self-esteem? If so, then the motives of the Christian woman in this situation must surely be questioned. Without a doubt, we can say she is not acting with either shamefacedness, nor modesty, nor sobriety (1 Timothy 2:9). Like Henry, I would urge them to behold Jezebel, and see if they are still comfortable in their.
Christian women should *carefully* consider how they wish to portray themselves (although all women with self respect should!)

**Male Modesty**

As I briefly stated above, I do not subscribe to the view that only men are stimulated visually. It may be that men are more stimulated in this regard (and some have argued that this is why pornography predominantly targets men), but it is an absurd fallacy to suggest that women are somehow not stimulated visually. In *Genesis 39, verse 7*, we are told how Potiphar's wife lusted over Joseph:

> "And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me."

Therefore, men should also think carefully about how they dress, and should be respectable and temperate in all things, *as becometh saints*.

It is sad that I have to reference it, but one of the most repugnant developments in modern society is the 'metrosexual' - the effeminate man who spends hours on his appearance (yet is still heterosexual). The feminizing of men has also led to tight-fitting clothing and low necklines, which are both effeminate and immodest. Rather, just as women should make an effort to be feminine, men also should be masculine. The new politically correct buzz-word 'gender-neutral' does not feature in scripture!

**Is Modesty Swept Away at the Beach?**

When at the beach, is it acceptable for men to be topless, and (if you are given to the ridiculous-looking things) to wear speedos? Likewise, is it okay for women to wear bikinis, or figure-hugging bathing suits? I think the answer should be obvious, and so I will only say one thing (using a female example, but the principle also applies to men): What would your reaction be if a stranger walked in on you wearing nothing but a bra and underwear? Would you not cover yourself!? Then how can you wear a bikini at the beach when it is essentially the same thing?
Jezebel

Jezebel, as 1 Kings 16 and 18 tells us, was the pagan consort of the wicked King Ahab, who killed the prophets of the Lord, and threatened also to kill Elijah after he had put to death the 400 prophets of Baal: "Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them [the slain prophets of Baal] by to morrow about this time."

(1 Kings 19:2). Of course, the one true God did hold her to her foolish words, as the dogs ate her by the wall of Jezreel (2 Kings 9:33-37).

Jezebel was manipulative in character, and scripture says that she "stirred" Ahab into idolatry and evils, such that God says "...there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD..."

(1 Kings 21:25).

Jezebel was, by all accounts, a whore, and is referred to as one in the only place in the New Testament that her name is mentioned: Revelation 2, where it is written to the angel of the church in Thyatira:

[20] Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.
[21] And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.
[22] Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.
[23] And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

So, the name of Jezebel is associated with harlotry and sexual immorality, and is used with...
Older folks will likely recall that in days gone past, a woman who wore excessive make-up was called a 'Jezebel'. I had heard this phrase a couple of times, and on reading the books of the Kings, it was interesting to finally learn what it meant. I can only presume that the label was applied with reference to Jezebel's 'painting her face' (ie, putting on make-up) before she was killed (2 Kings 9:30).

I do not wish to argue that taking care of one's appearance is sinful. But there is a difference between grooming and the vanity of heavy makeup. Like immodest clothing, makeup betrays inward pride, and more of the spirit of Jezebel than the Holy Spirit of God, which indwells the saints. Certain Puritan writings are helpful in this matter, and John Bunyan puts it thus: "...can it be imagined that those that paint themselves did ever repent of their pride? or that those that pursue this world did ever repent of their covetousness? or that those that walk with wanton eyes did ever repent of their fleshly lusts?"

I feel Bunyan puts it a little harshly, and perhaps forgets how Christians fall into sin, yet the thrust of his words are true, and Christians that are in this state should consider their ways, remembering that we should be separate from the world.

**Summary**

Scripture says, in numerous places, that we should show outwardly that which we, as Christians, claim has happened and is happening inwardly. We are to be both doers and hearers of the word. Thus, clean, modest attire reveals a chaste spirit, which is not given over to pride and vanity, nor to the ways of the world, which we are commanded to be separate from; but rather is holy and in subjection to God (see 1 Peter 3:3-6). A humble, chaste spirit is the mark of the genuine Christian, who has been deeply convicted of sin and saved by the grace of God.

Rather, women should have respect for themselves, instead of presenting themselves as sex objects. As one Christian said, when I asked her to define modesty: "It has a sense of hiddenness, rather than flaunting".

When I asked why that was important to her, she said "because some things don't belong to everyone". The answers are so simple and straightforward, but contain a good depth of meaning, and they are the kind of answers that all Christians should give.
Part of our love for one another is to help each other to live righteously, not placing stumbling-blocks in the way of our brethren. Rather, Paul exhorts us to provoke one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24)! In our sex-infused culture, how can Christians say they are acting righteously if modesty is relegated as some relic of a bygone era.

May Christians everywhere live in submission to God, with chaste spirits and sober minds, and may these Godly attributes be manifested outwardly in how we carry ourselves. May our bodies be presented as “…a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God…”, and “…not conformed to this world…” (Romans 12:1-2)

References


2  http://www.nyhistory.com/gerritsmith/esm.htm

3  The Barren Fig Tree; or, The Doom and Downfall of the Fruitless Professor’ ; John Bunyan : London ; Printed for J. Robinson, at the Golden Lion, in St. Paul's Churchyard, 1688

4  Matthew Henry's Commentary of the Bible - 2 Kings 9:30