

Girls Gone Mild

(1 Timothy 2:9-10)

While human sexuality is a Bible topic, it is also a very sensitive topic. Therefore, I want to assure you from the outset that I am aware that this is a mixed assembly with regard to gender as well as age, and will do my best to speak as clearly as I can while remaining in the realm of what I believe is appropriate.

Second, I want you to know that the motive behind this sermon is not to single anyone out or embarrass anyone, or to step on someone's toes. In fact, if I step on your toes today, I will have failed because I am not aiming for your toes, I'm aiming for your hearts. The motive behind this sermon is to help bring our lives into better conformity with the will of God.

And third, I want you to know that I really don't enjoy preaching sermons like this. In fact, I don't know anyone who does. Out of curiosity, I went online this past week to a website that contains over 150,000 sermon outlines. That's fifteen hundred years of preaching twice on Sunday. Would you like to guess how many sermons on this website addressed the topic of modesty? Seven! Just seven sermons out of 150,000 sermons addressed the topic of modesty. Judging from that, modesty must not be an issue in our culture. Either that, or we just don't want to talk about it. I could easily join the crowd and say nothing about this Bible topic, however, if I did, I would be unfaithful as a preacher. I someday want to be able to stand before God and say as did the apostle Paul, "I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27). Modesty is as much a biblical issue as baptism or the Lord's Supper. Would we idly sit by in our churches and watch as God's truth on baptism or worship was hijacked or discarded? Surely not. Then why would we idly sit back in our churches and witness God's truth on modesty being ignored? If I were to lack the courage or well, maybe more accurately stated, "love" ...If I were to lack the love to speak the truth in season and out of season, then I would need to step down out of this pulpit. In order to be faithful to God and true to my vocation, I must be willing to "reprove" and "rebuke" as well as "praise" and "edify" the body of Christ.

Today I ask that you give me your ears. I ask that you listen with an open and honest heart. I ask that you would not try to justify and defend yourself, but rather justify God and defend his holiness and his standard for our lives.

Brethren, we have an unspoken problem in our congregation. It's unspoken, but it's not a hidden problem, for we all see it. We just haven't said much about it, and I suspect that is due to the sensitive nature of the problem. You see, we have a problem with modesty. And if I can illustrate that problem by referencing a fairy tale, I will do so. Do you remember reading, or having read to you a fairy tale by Hans Christian Anderson entitled "The Emperor's New Clothes?" Well, according to the story, there was once an emperor who loved beautiful clothes. He spent a small fortune on fine clothes. He loved to parade around his kingdom, showing off his fine clothes to his subjects. One day two swindlers came to his kingdom. They told the emperor that they were weavers, and claimed to know how to make the finest cloth imaginable. Not only were the colors and the patterns extraordinarily beautiful, but in addition, this material had the amazing property that it was to be invisible to anyone who was incompetent or foolish.

The emperor thought how wonderful it would be to have clothes made from that cloth. Then he could know which of his men were unfit for their positions, and he would be able to discern between the wise and the unwise. So the emperor paid these two swindlers a great sum of money to weave him some clothes from this cloth.

The day finally arrived that the clothes were completed. But because everyone knew that it had been said that only the “unwise” could not see the clothes, they all pretended to see the emperor's new clothes. Even the emperor himself. So the emperor put on his new clothes and paraded down the streets of his kingdom.

While everyone could see that the emperor was naked, no one wanted to be seen as foolish, so they pretended to see his new clothes. Finally, the emperor walked by a little child, and the child looked at the emperor and said, “Why, he doesn't have any clothes on.” Then one by one, the people came to their senses and agreed with the child that the emperor was indeed naked.

The intent of this lesson is to verbalize what we've all been thinking to ourselves, but have been reluctant to speak. The truth that so many of you have witnessed, and have whispered about in your pews, and have talked about in hushed tones on your way home or to lunch so that the children don't hear, needs to be spoken aloud. The pretending has gone on long enough.

Henry Van Til, a professor of Bible at Calvin College once observed that, “Culture is religion externalized.” By this he meant that the culture of a nation reflects the true faith of that people. The way people live, talk, dress, and work all reflect the standards and priorities of the people.

Along that same line of thought, I would like to suggest that “dress is also religion externalized.” Cultures that are enslaved to material possessions tend to fall prey to an enslavement to high fashion. Cultures that treasure sensuality tend to dress immodestly. And cultures which embrace true Christian piety will seek to make personal holiness the driving standard for their dress code. In short, what I'm trying to say is that “dress is not neutral.” It speaks volumes.

The way people dress reveals much about their character, what they value, and what they are pursuing and trying to achieve. Some people dress in a way that speaks “success.” In fact, our society has coined the phrase “dressed for success” to describe a specific type of clothing (Matthew 11:8). The Bible provides us an example of dress that makes a religious statement (2 Samuel 3:31; 14:2; Matthew 11:21). Sackcloth was worn to proclaim one's penitence and humility before God. The Bible even records for us that clothing makes a moral statement as well. (Proverbs 7:10) speaks of putting on the “clothes of a harlot.” Some clothing not only speaks “sexuality,” but it screams it! Clothing designers have all but stolen the innocence of childhood. Little girls wear under-garments as well as outer-garments that have caused our society to coin the phrase “prostitots.” Do we really want our six-year old girls dressing “sexy?” And fathers, do you really want your daughters to be ogled by hormone driven young men because your daughter's clothing teases and tantalizes their lusts? And as we look around, or when you go to the mall, just take a minute and watch the people as they walk by. What kind of message are they conveying? Success? Religious? Rebellion? As you are sitting here today, your dress speaks. And those around you

are listening to your dress and are logically and legitimately drawing conclusions about your character. My question is, when one listens to our dress, are they getting a message that is consistent with our profession?

I never cease to be amazed at the irony of some who lament the fact that they aren't taken seriously, and are simply treated as little more than a sex object, or they resent being treated, not as a person, but as a thing. And yet these same people often dress suggestively and sensuously. I think we all recognize the maxim which states, "Your actions speak louder than your words." This truth is born out in the way we dress. One can profess godliness and Christian virtue all they want with their words, but if their dress professes sensuality and provocativeness, people won't hear your words, they'll hear your dress.

I understand that modesty is a controversial issue. No matter how one approaches the subject, he will be judged a legalist by some, or a libertarian by others. However, I assure you that my objective is not controversy, nor is it to bind my scruples or opinions on you. If you think I am about to get out a ruler and tell you how many inches constitute too short or too low-cut, you're mistaken. Even the Lord did not do that as he addressed this topic through the inspired apostle Paul. What he did however, was teach us the purpose of clothing and the message our clothing ought to send.

I think one of the problems we have with dress today is that we seem to have forgotten the fundamental purpose of it. Clothing was intended by God, to be worn to "cover" our bodies and to "hide" our nakedness. However, today many wear clothing to "expose" their bodies, draw attention to parts of the body that entice, tantalize, and excite the imagination. And that misses the purpose of clothing.

Therefore, let's go back to the beginning. When God created Adam and Eve in the beginning, the Bible says in Genesis 2:25 that they were "both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." They felt no sense of public disgrace or humiliation. However, after they succumbed to sin, their eyes were opened, having an awareness of shame, so they sewed fig leaves together to make a covering for themselves (Genesis 3:7). God looked at their situation, and their feeble attempt to cover themselves, then killed animals and fashioned coats or tunics of skin to adequately, and more permanently cover them.

Although we have no "snapshots" of Adam and Eve's apparel, the Hebrew word "coat" or "tunic" refers to a long shirt-like garment. The point is, God's expectation was quite different than man's. Man offered as a covering for himself that which was insufficient, so God intervened and clothed them himself. I don't think mankind has changed much from the days of our original parents. We are still dressing ourselves inadequately, and if God were to intervene, he'd put more clothes on us. Not only does this passage address the issue of modesty, but it is rich with theological and redemptive truths.

As one comes to New Testament, he can read Paul's instructions regarding our dress. In 1 Timothy 2:9,10 Paul instructs women to "adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety [KJV - shamefacedness] and moderation...that which is proper for women professing godliness and good works." I suppose at this point we need to define some terms.

The term "modesty" is a broad concept not limited to a sexual connotation. In fact, in this particular

context, it is addressing the problem of over-dressing. Modest has the general meaning of respectable, and honorable, having a regard for decency of behavior or dress.

The term “propriety” or “shamefacedness” denotes a sense of shame that would cause one to shrink from trespassing the boundaries of what is modest. The person Paul describes here is not one who tries to walk a fine line between modesty and immodesty, but rather shrinks in shame from the possibility of being immodest.

Well, to summarize these terms, one could say that the way one dresses should not draw attention to themselves in the wrong way. One’s dress should not say “Sex!” or “Pride” or “Money,” but rather “Purity,” “Humility,” and “Moderation.” You say you can’t dress that way and be cool? You say you can’t dress that way and have friends, get dates, and fit in? My question is of what concern should “fitting in with the world” have to do with a Christian, and the choices he or she makes? Paul literally begged us not to be conformed to the world (Romans 12:2). Are we really so shallow and undisciplined that we are more concerned about what our friends think, than what our Lord thinks? Friends, modesty is not first an issue of clothing. Rather it is an issue of the heart. And if one’s heart is right with God, it will govern our dress in purity and shamefacedness.

Ladies, specifically, I am going to try to be as plain as I can be while respecting the diverse makeup of this assembly. I appeal to you as a man, and a brother in Christ, and on behalf of all your brothers here today. Please, cover yourself, and do so in a way that doesn’t draw attention to your sexuality, but rather to your purity. Don’t wear clothing that teases, tantalizes, or that shows just enough flesh to arouse one’s curiosity or imagination. Please for our sake, don’t dress in such a fashion that leaves us wondering if you want to be chased, but rather confirms to us that you want to be chaste. If you are naive and don’t understand how visual men are, and don’t know how strong and how easy it is to fan the flames of sexuality, then you need to listen to me, because I am here to tell you for all the men present today. Ladies, we came here to worship God, not to be distracted by your short skirts low cut tops which expose or accentuate your female form. Surely, you do not want to become a stumbling block for others. But I assure you that if your dress does not profess godliness, that is exactly what you are for the men who are sitting near you. Ladies, I appeal to you on behalf of all the men present today, to understand what is at stake here, and to act toward us in love, seeking our best.

Now allow me to quickly turn my attention in another direction. Modesty does not limit itself to the realm of sexuality but also to propriety. And just as wrong as it is to dress in a way that flaunts one’s sexuality, it is also wrong to dress in a way that shows contempt for what is holy, and lacks reverence and respect. While I know God looks on the heart, and doesn’t discriminate in the way he treats us based on our wealth or lack thereof as it is reflected in one’s clothing, that is not to say that God gives no thought to the way we dress as we assemble before him. While I understand we live in an ever growing casual society, we must not allow our laid back approach to encroach upon the way we approach God. The world should not dictate how Christians approach their God. Even in our casual society, there are societal norms for dress that shows respect and reverence. Friends, God is God. He’s not our pal. Speech or dress that tends to bring Him down to our level and lessen the awe and reverence we have for him when we approach him is totally inappropriate. Have we given thought lately to passages such as Psalm 89:7? “God is greatly to

be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around him.” Remember, our dress speaks. Does it speak reverence and respect? Is it consistent with that passage? If not, our attire needs to change.

In 2005, the Northwestern Women’s Lacrosse team was invited to the White House to meet the President. Their appearance caused a great stir across our nation because several of the girls showed up wearing flip-flops. Even in our causal, laid back society, this was considered a grievous lack of respect for the Presidency of the United States.

My point is this... As laid back and causal as our society may be, there are still norms of propriety. And while I will not judge one by their dress, based upon their money or lack of, I want to also say that we have not assembled here today for a back yard barbeque, picnic, or to play a pick up game of basketball or football. Do you understand that we have approached the presence of God today? Do you understand that we have gathered here today to surround ourselves around the Lord’s table and to commune with him? If your dress is not consistent with the greatness of this occasion, then it lacks the reverence, and modesty that ought to be exhibited, and more than likely, you are a distraction to those around you.

Brethren, as I bring this lesson to a close, I know that I have probably offended some. If I have offended you, I would ask that you, in a gentle way, point out to me what I have said that is not true, or what I have said that has not been spoken in love, and I will apologize. I also know that some may not be offended, but will be tempted to just simply dismiss what I’ve said today as irrelevant or simply my opinion. That’s where I want you, the congregation to become involved in this sermon. I want to leverage the influence and wisdom collectively possessed by this congregation. Therefore, I want to ask you, all of you, before next Sunday, to write down your thoughts about this lesson. Do you concur? Has this issue been troublesome to you? Have you been afraid of the potential influence it might have on your children, or affect it might have on your spouse? Then write me a note, send me an email, or call me on the phone. I want to anonymously publish your thoughts so everyone here will know, not how Steve Higginbotham understands this issue, but how the church here understands this issue. Hopefully, this influence will come to bear on the way this lesson is responded to.

Brethren, I close this lesson with an appeal to love. I appeal that we act in love toward one another, and most importantly, we act in love toward our Heavenly Father. And the way we do that is to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, he will exalt us in due time (1 Peter 5:6).