

Modesty in Apparel: Bringing a Believer's Attire into Subjection to the Word of God

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“In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works” (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the biblical teaching on modesty and the moral, appropriate way for Christian men and women to dress. This is a neglected subject in our day because this topic is controversial and has engendered widely different views in the professing Christian community. On one end of the spectrum are those who generally ignore this question and who largely have imitated the clothing styles (whether modest or not) of our society. (This author has attended Reformed churches where women were wearing miniskirts, very short shorts, “sexy” tank tops and skin tight, thin, cotton pants. In many evangelical and some Reformed churches pool parties with skimpy bikinis are considered perfectly acceptable.) It is not the case that all such professing Christians have self-consciously and deliberately set out to dress immodestly. These current practices more reflect ignorance based on a failure to apply the Word of God to every area of life. Many people have not given the way they dress any serious thought. On the other end of the spectrum are those who have adopted a legalistic, neoplatonic, Anabaptist concept of dress because of unscriptural presuppositions, sloppy exegesis, fallacious reasoning and a love of human traditions. While it is certainly wrong for professing Christians to dress immodestly in imitation of the pagan world around us, it is also sinful and dangerous spiritually to add to or go beyond the teaching of God's Word. As we examine this difficult topic, there are a number of things to note by way of introduction.

First, we need to define the term “modest” according to Scripture. In classical Greek the word “modest” (*kosmios*) was used to describe a person who was self-controlled and thus lived a moral, respectable life. The usage of the word as a moral virtue grew out of the idea that what was ordered, controlled, measured or balanced is good or proper. Its closest *opposite* would be something chaotic, disorderly or in the ethical sphere something licentious. This term was derived from *kosmos* (i.e. universe, world, order, etc.) “in the sense of ‘order,’ then of ‘adornment,’ *kosmios* thus means ‘self-controlled,’ ‘disciplined,’ ‘well-mannered,’ ‘honourable.’”¹ In the New Testament this word is used to describe a qualification of an overseer or elder in 1 Timothy 3:2. In this passage it has the sense of “honourable,” “modest,” “of good behavior” (NKJV), or “morally disciplined.” In English, when referring to dress or appearance,

¹ Herman Sasse, “*Kosmios*” in Gerhard Kittel, Ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Trans., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:896.

the term refers to the proper or fitting appearance (i.e. an adornment that is not lascivious or does not incite lust). A secondary meaning would refer to a lack of showiness or ostentation. In the Greek New Testament the meaning is essentially the same. Thus, in 1 Timothy 2:9 Paul is telling Christian women to wear apparel appropriate for a Christian; that is, clothing which covers the body decently and therefore does not give occasion for men to lust. In addition, he condemns clothing that is *excessively* showy, costly, luxurious or ostentatious. While he does not tell believers to look like slobs or poor persons, he also does not want them to imitate heathen women who worship clothing and adornments. The Christian's dress ought to reflect the humility, modesty and priorities of the renewed heart.

In 1 Timothy 2:9 the word "modest" is accompanied by an adjectival preposition that is designed to reinforce Paul's imperative and shed light on its meaning: "with propriety and moderation" (NKJV). The first word in Greek is *aidos* (which has been translated "shamefacedness" [KJV],² "shamefastness" [ASV], "modesty" [Wuest], "prudently" [Berkeley], "sensibly" [RSV], "modestly" [NEB, NASB], "quietly" [Moffet], "decency" [NIV]). This word refers to a proper state of mind which is the platform for modest behavior. It implies an attitude informed by biblical ethics which finds unseemly, lascivious behavior repugnant. It also indicates a certain amount of godly self-respect that restrains oneself from crossing the line of biblical propriety. Paul understands that the key to modesty in dress is a sanctified attitude that is happy to place limits on one's behavior.

The second word is "sobriety" (KJV) or "moderation" (NKJV). This Greek word (*sophrosune*) refers to an inner self-government or strong control over one's illicit passions and desires so that they are kept in check and thus one's behavior remains within the path of God's moral precepts. For Paul, self-control or mastery over one's autonomous desires or sinful passions is necessary for women to dress modestly. Because of the fall and our sinful natures, women often have an unlawful desire to be lusted after. They want to draw attention to themselves and one, easy and popular way to do so is by accentuating one's sexuality or wealth or both. In modern society this sinful tendency is on full display at Hollywood award ceremonies where women dress immodestly in every sense of the word and parade themselves on the red carpet. Christian women, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, are to control themselves in this area to glorify God and nurture their progressive sanctification.

Second, the Bible does not lay out an explicit guide with regard to clothing. In fact, the only dress code in Scripture is the one God instituted for the priests who ministered in the tabernacle or temple (e.g., Ex. 28:3-4). Therefore, when it comes to ascertaining the proper mode of dress for believers we will need to carefully study God's Word and make *logical inferences* regarding modesty. A study of the law and the prophets will be especially helpful in determining

² Regarding the KJV translation, "shamefacedness," Ralph Earle writes, "This unfortunate translation leaves the implication that Christian women should go around in public with heads bowed and eyes averted, as if they were ashamed of themselves. Not so. Actually this rendering appears to be an error. *The Oxford English Dictionary* says that the adjective 'shamefacedness' was 'originally an etymological misinterpretation of *shamefast*' (9:620) which carries the idea of discreetness. Wycliff's earliest English version of the Bible (1382) has the correct term here, 'shamefastness.' This is used in the ASV (1901), but, of course, even this word is obsolete today" (*Word Meanings in the New Testament* [Peabody, MA: Hendriksen, 1974], 388).

the biblical definition of “nakedness” or what parts of the body are deemed inappropriate for public display. In addition, we would do well to compare the godly Jewish mode of dress with immodest forms in the ancient world.

Third, we need to consider the somewhat difficult task of applying what we have learned about modesty within different cultural contexts. Although the Bible has a very objective standard with regard to what should not be exposed and the fact that clothing should not be sexually stimulating or ostentatious, there are cultural matters that must be considered when applying the seventh commandment³ to issues such as determining proper attire that pertains to a man or woman. For example, in the twenty first century, is it wrong for a woman to wear pants? There is a large body of writing on the internet devoted to the idea that women wearing pants is a violation of Deuteronomy 22:5. We will consider this question at length because it will help us to avoid turning an older cultural practice or human tradition into a supposed ethical absolute. Society’s definition of what is proper attire for men and women is in flux and has radically changed over time. Therefore, what was considered normal dress in Gaul in A.D. 65 might be considered effeminate or a sign of homosexuality in 1965 (men used to wear skirts or kilt-like garments). The important thing is that we use God’s Word as our final, sufficient, sole standard on these issues and let it determine what is appropriate within our culture. If we do not, we could easily fall into a culturally conditioned legalism like the Amish or strict Mennonites.

Fourth, no discussion of modesty would be complete without an examination of makeup and jewelry. Does the Bible (in passages such as 1 Timothy 2:9-10 and 1 Peter 3:3-4) give Christians an absolute prohibition on the wearing of jewelry (gold, pearls, gemstones, silver) or are Paul and Peter concerned with an abuse, an excess, an ostentatious or immodest use of such things? This point will teach us the importance of interpreting individual passages according to the analogy of Scripture or the broader context of Scripture.

May God enable us to understand His inspired Word and give us wisdom in this important, yet neglected, matter. A biblical understanding and application of this issue is crucial, given the fact that we live in a sex-obsessed culture. Believers ought to set an example of godliness by their chaste behavior and modest appearance.

³ The Puritans placed all matters relating to sexual immorality under the seventh commandment. The *Westminster Larger Catechism* deals with modesty under its exposition of the seventh commandment in questions 138 and 139: Q. 138: What are the duties required in the seventh commandment? A. The duties required in the seventh commandment are, chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior; and the preservation of it in ourselves and others; watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses; temperance, keeping of chaste company, *modesty in apparel*...shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto. Q. 139: What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment? A. The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks, impudent or light behavior, *immodest apparel*...unchaste company, lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays; and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others (*emphasis added*).

Chapter 1: Nakedness and Indecency Defined by Scripture

Although the Bible does not spell out a dress code or give explicit instructions as to what to wear in everyday public life, it does tell us what parts of the body should not be exposed to the general public. By examining what the Bible regards as indecent exposure, we can arrive at an objective standard for modesty in the sphere of sexuality. Therefore, we will briefly survey the biblical teaching on nakedness.

Before the Fall

In Genesis 2:25 we read, “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” At the climax of the creation narrative, Moses notes that Adam and Eve were nude yet felt no shame before God or each other. At this time sin had not yet entered the world and thus their sexuality was pure and innocent. Because they were without sin and guilt they were also without shame. From the fall narrative in chapter 3 we see that a sense of shame is a direct consequence of a consciousness of guilt resulting from a transgression against God’s revealed will. “Shame destroys a person’s inner harmony and supplants it with a sense of disgrace and fearfulness. It is the loss of God’s favor, and a loss of esteem before one’s fellow men.”⁴ Adam and Eve’s sense of shame, unworthiness, disgrace, failure and fearfulness was before God, who they knew was holy and righteous. (Interestingly, nakedness will often be associated with humiliation, shame and guilt throughout the prophets [cf. Ezek. 16:22, 37, 39; Hos. 2:3; Amos 2:16; Mic. 1:8]. In the ancient world the abbreviated dress of prisoners of war and slaves was a deliberate policy to shame and humiliate them.)

The fact that Adam and Eve were naked before the fall does not mean that nudism would have been the practice of the human race if the fall had never occurred. We can infer that clothes would have been invented and used from the following observations. First, Adam and Eve were husband and wife and thus their nakedness was not a sin either pre-fall or post-fall. In the narrative the focus is on their sense of shame, not on their nudity. When Adam and Eve had grown children and a society of people had come into existence, they would have covered their nakedness appropriately. In the new heavens and earth where sin and guilt has been abolished and men and women have glorified bodies that cannot lust or sin, people will still wear clothing (Rev. 6:11; 7:9, 13, 14). Second, the creation ordinance of monogamous heterosexual marriage and the moral law’s regulations regarding the exposing of the nakedness of non-spouses, etc., presupposes the necessity of clothing in public areas. Third, the dominion mandate with its command to subdue the earth would require clothing at a minimum as protective gear or a tool for productive labor. One would not be expected to ride a horse, do welding or scuba dive in northern waters naked. Clothing not only is designed to protect the sanctity of marriage, but is a necessary tool for godly dominion.

⁴ Rousas John Rushdoony, *Genesis* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2002), 30.

The Invention of Clothing

The first mention of clothing in Scripture comes as an immediate consequence of the fall. Genesis 3:7-11 reads,

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, "Where art thou?" And he said, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." And he said, "Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?"

Satan had promised Eve that if she ate of the forbidden fruit she would be like God, knowing good and evil. In verse 7 Adam and Eve's eyes were opened, but only to the shocking realization that they were naked. The consciousness of their nakedness that strongly disturbed them was not a simply a knowledge of the fact that they were not wearing any clothes and it was *not* a consciousness of their sexuality; but it was connected to their spiritual, inner sense of guilt before God. They not only sewed fig trees together to cover themselves, but also hid themselves among the trees when they heard God walking toward them (v. 8). Because they felt shame and guilt, they could not bear to stand naked before the gaze of a holy and just God. They now understood that they were stained with sin and were no longer what they were intended to be. The shame associated with their nakedness does not teach that husbands and wives must wear clothes *when alone*, for our first parents' dread was only an outward manifestation of their inner sense of guilt before God. This point is supported by verse 10 where Adam's excuse for hiding, "because I was naked," is taken as evidence by God of Adam's sin in verse 11.

The main point of the narrative is that Adam and Eve's guilt led them to seek a covering. But the covering that they made for themselves was definitely inadequate or non-efficacious. They concealed themselves in the lush vegetation the moment God drew near. Only Jehovah could provide an acceptable covering for them by blood atonement. God slew an animal and clothed Adam and Eve with coats of skin to cover their sense of shame (cf. Gen. 3:21). This narrative clearly points to Jesus Christ and His vicarious death. Our first parents could do nothing to alleviate their guilt since the penalty for sin is death. God taught them that the only remedy for sin and guilt is blood atonement. (The Cain and Abel narrative in chapter 4 assumes that Adam's children had knowledge of blood sacrifice.)

In verse 21 we are told that God made "tunics of skins." The word "tunics" (*kethoneth*) is used later of a robe-like garment worn next to one's skin. It was worn by both men and women (2 Sam. 13:18, 19; 15:32). A fine linen version of this garment was worn by the priests (Ex. 28:39; 39:27). Whether this "tunic" resembled the tunics worn by Jews for centuries we do not know. (Jewish tunics went to the knees or ankles). The important thing to know is that God provided them with proper clothing.

Modest Dress in the Bible

Although clothing styles have changed several times over the past five thousand years, an examination of Hebrew dress will be helpful in determining how godly Jews dressed. Generally speaking Jews, both men and women, wore five pieces of clothing. First, there was the undergarment (i.e. our equivalent to underwear; Hebrew-*ketonet*, *kuttonet*, Greek-*chiton*). People are often confused about this item when reading their Bibles because it has been translated as: “tunic,” “garment,” “coat” and “robe.” This piece of clothing was worn next to the skin and was usually made of linen, which was soft and did not itch like wool. It resembled our tee shirts except it was much longer, looser, but not as soft as cotton. This garment could have long sleeves or no sleeves at all. Jesus wore a seamless tunic which would have been of little use to the Roman soldiers if cut into four pieces, so they decided to cast lots for it (cf. Jn. 19:23f). It is mentioned in 2 Samuel 13:18 (Tamar’s robe of many colors), Song of Solomon 5:3 (the sleeping attire of the Shulamite), Exodus 29:8 (the undergarment of the priests) and Leviticus 16:4 (the holy linen tunic of the high priest).

Second, there was an outer garment called a robe, long robe, cloak, wrapper, mantle or vesture (Hebrew-*kesut*, *salma*, *begeg*, *mitpahat*; Greek, *himation*). This was a large cloth with arm holes used by men and women. It was wrapped around the body like a blanket. The girdle or belt helped hold it in place. At night it would be used as a blanket for sleeping (cf. Gen. 9:23; Ex. 22:26ff; Dt. 22:17). Ruth’s mantle or robe was large enough to carry “six measures of barley” (3:15). In the gospel accounts we are told that the robe or cloak (*himation*) was worn over the tunic (*chiton*) (cf. Mt. 5:40; Lk. 6:29). When working in the hot sun or when fishing, men would set the cloak aside for comfort and for safety (cf. Mt. 24:18; Mk. 10:50).

From ancient monuments we know that the cloak was worn anywhere from slightly below the knee (e.g., Egyptian monuments showing Semites [possibly the Hapiru or Hebrews]), to the ankles. This is how several attendants of Jehu are pictured on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser. Some scholars have suggested that the cloaks of the wealthy and cloaks worn on formal occasions were generally longer than the average everyday peasant’s robe.

The long flowing robes worn by Jews could be an impediment when walking fast, running, working or fighting and thus we frequently encounter Jews “girding up their loins” for such activities. This involved taking the loose, flowing robe and pulling it up and around the upper legs and fastening it to a leather or linen strap, belt or “girdle” so the robe was made like pants.

The outer garment worn by Jews does not appear to have any large differences between the men and the women. The sexes were likely distinguished by their head gear, jewelry and possibly stylistic differences (e.g., perhaps the women’s cloak was more decorative or stylish). What is significant for the purpose of this study is that men and women did not expose their thighs or cleavage in mixed company. When we study the biblical concept of nakedness we will see that this extensive coverage was not arbitrary or merely cultural.

Third, men often wore head gear (a turban, Hebrew-*misnepet*, *sanip*, *peer*, *tebulim*), especially in the hot sun. The high priest was required to wear a turban (*misnepet*) of linen (Ex. 28:39; 39:28; Lev. 16:4). It is generally recognized by scholars that Jewish women wore a veil when out in public (cf. Gen. 24:65). Head coverings (i.e. a cloth placed over a woman’s long hair) are required in *public worship* by the apostle Paul writing under divine inspiration (1 Cor. 11:3-16).

The fourth item was sandals (Hebrew, *naal* [LXX, *hypoedma*], *minal*; Greek, *sandalion* (Mk. 6:9; Ac. 12:8) or *hypodema* (Mk. 3:11). These were held in place with a leather lace or sandal tong. The soles were made of hard leather with upper portions of finer soft leather. The Jews did not consider viewing the feet as improper for leather footwear like shoes would have been rare and expensive. In addition, in the days of our Lord it was customary to remove one's sandals and wash one's feet as soon as one entered another's residence. It appears that people would walk about the house barefoot while leaving their dirty sandals next to the front door (cf. Lk. 7:44-46; Jn. 13:10-14).⁵

Fifth, both men and women wore a belt or girdle (KJV) of leather or linen. This was used to hold the large blanket-like cloak tight around the waist. Its primary function was to position the robe so that it would not impede movement (cf. Lk. 12:35, 27; 17:8). "As a belt, it held both the sword (Judg. 3:16; 1 Sam. 25:13; 2 Sam. 20:8) and the purse (Matt. 10:9)."⁶

The only other piece of clothing that we need to mention is the holy underwear or "breeches" (KJV) designed by God for the priests. These were made of plain linen and may have been similar to boxer shorts. This special undergarment was required to be worn by all priests in perpetuity so that their genitals would not be exposed near Jehovah's special presence at the tabernacle or temple (cf. Ex. 20:26; 28:42; 39:28; Lev. 6:10; 16:4; Ezek. 44:18). These special undergarments were not worn by all men, but only those who ministered as priests. (We mention them here because they have been repeatedly abused in the debate over pants.)

The point of this brief survey is to demonstrate that modesty as practiced in biblical times involved covering the body from the neck to below the knees. Only the neck, the arms, the feet and ankles were allowed to be exposed. Moreover, the type of clothing worn was *loose fitting* and thus did not reveal the shape of the buttocks, thighs or breasts. Therefore, although cultural styles of dress over time and in different geographical areas are, generally speaking, areas of *adiaphora* (i.e. indifferent and not explicitly regulated by Scripture), nevertheless God has revealed the standard of modesty. The covenant people had no problem with modest styles of clothing found within the Middle Eastern cultural milieu of the day. But, *unlike* many professing Christians in our day, they by and large rejected the immodest styles of clothing that were common among their pagan neighbors.

In Egypt, for example, women wore close-fitting sheath dresses that would be considered sexy even by today's standards. "Depictions of Akhenaten's wife Nefertari [c. 1365-1349 BC], and her six daughters show them in long, flowing, pleated linen drapery. They are portrayed as what we would think of as erotic icons, with slender waists and rounded buttocks and thighs."⁷ It was considered immoral and out of character for wealthy Egyptians to appear naked before others. But, it was perfectly acceptable for commoners, slaves and children to appear naked.

In the Minoan culture of ancient Crete women wore stylized, form-fitting colorful dresses that went down to their ankles. They wore a tightly fitting bodice (i.e. a woman's laced, outer garment resembling a corset) below the chest area that left their breasts fully exposed. Nudity

⁵ Professing Christians who argue that people's ankles and feet must never be exposed (This view is usually based on a misinterpretation of Jeremiah 13:22. The KJV's "heels made bare" should be translated "your heels are violently bared" or "your heels have suffered violence." This expression is a euphemism for a sexual attack by invading soldiers.) must explain the Savior's highly favorable description of the woman's washing and anointing of His own feet.

⁶ G. G. Swain, "Girdle" in Gen. Ed. Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975, 76), 2:728.

⁷ Bronwyn Cosgrave, *The Complete History of Costume and Fashion from Ancient Egypt to the Present Day* (Great Britain: Hamly, 2000), 17.

was acceptable for males and “men of any rank or status roamed freely in the nude.”⁸ When the men did wear clothes they were immodest with short skirts, a loin cloth and belts with small aprons. They also wore tight-fitting shorts with decorative tassels. Long before the birth of Christ public bathing and swimming was popular among Greeks and Romans. “A mural found in Sicily’s Piazza Armerina pictures young maidens wearing scanty garments that are dead ringers for modern bikinis.”⁹ Moreover, sporting events, which were popular in ancient Greece, were usually conducted in the nude. The point is that immodest dress has existed for thousands of years. The people of God have a responsibility to examine clothing styles within their own cultural context and emphatically reject anything that is contrary to the biblical definition of modesty.

The Biblical Concept of Nakedness

Another area that will be helpful in determining modesty is the biblical use of the term naked or nakedness. The Word of God teaches that the exposure of one’s nakedness outside the lawful marriage relationship is sinful, shameful and totally inappropriate. It also regards the exposure of certain parts of the body (e.g., the thighs) that are perfectly acceptable today as a form of nakedness. There are a number of relevant passages to consider.

First, there is the incident of Ham and his father, Noah. In Genesis 9 Noah becomes drunk and goes to sleep in his tent and his blanket falls off leaving him nude and fully exposed. In verse 22 we are told “Ham saw the nakedness of his father.” Then in verse 23 Shem and Japheth take a garment and walk backwards into the tent in order to cover their father without seeing him naked. This incident results in a curse on Canaan, a direct descendent of Ham in verse 25. The fact that the text says only that “Ham saw the nakedness of his father” and that the immediate remedy was to cover their father’s nakedness while avoiding seeing him naked indicates that at a minimum it was improper even for Noah’s own sons to look at him naked. Ham had a responsibility to abstain from looking at his father’s exposed genitalia and should have covered him up so others would not see his nakedness. This was both a violation of modesty which falls under the seventh commandment and a failure to respect his father which is under the fifth commandment.

Second, in Leviticus 18, where there are several moral laws dealing with sexual immorality, we repeatedly find the imperative, “you shall not uncover the nakedness.” This expression is connected with close relatives (v. 6), father or mother (v. 7), step-mother (v. 8), sister or half-sister (v. 9), granddaughter (v. 10), step-sister (v. 11), aunt (vs. 12, 13), aunt by marriage (v. 14), daughter-in-law (v. 15), sister-in-law (v. 16) and step-granddaughter (v. 17). The expression “uncover the nakedness of” refers to sexual relations or intercourse. It is a phrase that implies both the presence of impure motives (Ezek. 16:36; 23:18; Hos. 2:9-10) and the intense shame associated with gross impurity and judgment. Thus, it is used to describe the horrifying fate of women who have been taken captive (Isa. 47:3; Lam. 1:18; Ezek. 16:37).

Third, in the prophetic books, nakedness is often associated with humiliation and shame. In Isaiah 20:4 we are told that the king of Assyria will lead Egyptian and Ethiopian prisoners of war away “naked and barefoot, with the buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.” Captives were deliberately humiliated by removing their clothes. Such a situation reminds us of the time that Harrun deliberately humiliated David’s servants by shaving off half of their beards and

⁸ Ibid, 35.

⁹ Jeff Pollard, *Christian Modesty and the Public Undressing of America* (Pensacola, FL: Mt. Zion Pub., n. d.), 17.

cutting off their garments in the middle, exposing their buttocks before sending them away (cf. 2 Sam. 10:4). If the Bible regards exposing the buttocks as humiliating and shameful, then obviously Christians (male or female) should not deliberately show off their buttocks with swimwear or tight pants.

In Isaiah 47:3 Babylon's humiliation and reproach is described as the uncovering of her nakedness. This nakedness results in disgrace and shame. In verse 2 the nature of this degradation is more specific: "Review your veil, take off the skirt, uncover the thigh." The people of Babylon will be reduced to a base form of slavery. The proper attire of a woman of dignity is exchanged for the dress of a slave. The veil of the hair is removed. This was considered immodest in most cultures until the 20th century. The garments that normally covered the legs modestly are removed for humiliation and heavy labor. The female slave in most ancient cultures was degraded and treated as a sex object. It is noteworthy that the uncovering of the thigh in verse 2 is equated with nakedness in verse 3. What modern American woman today regard as attractive, sexy and stylish (i.e. bathing suits, mini-skirts, hot-pants, short shorts, etc.), God regards as a form of nakedness that ought to be humiliating and shameful.

In a similar vein we are told in Nahum 3:5 that because Nineveh played the role of a harlot to the nations, she would suffer a whore's punishment: "Behold, I am against you," says the LORD of hosts; "I will lift your skirts over your face, I will show the nations your nakedness, and the kingdoms your shame." Their judgment is set forth with three clauses that essentially describe the same thing from different perspectives. The uncovering of the skirts upon their face means that the long flowing robes will be flipped up over their head to expose the body underneath. "Apparently this exposure was part of the customary public disgrace decreed for harlots, and similar treatment is announced for Hosea's adulterous wife (Hos. 2:3), for unfaithful Israel (Jer. 13:26), for inconstant Jerusalem (Ezek. 16:37ff), for the people of Saphir in Micah 1:11. Certainly captives of war were made to endure the disgrace of nakedness. See Is. 47:2, 3 (of Babylon) and Is. 20:24 (of Egypt and Ethiopia)."¹⁰ Interestingly, sexual immorality is associated not simply with abject humiliation, disgrace and shame but also blindness. The prostitute was put on public exhibition with her own disgusting, filthy skirt covering her face. Our wicked nation's spiritual blindness is reflected in her whore-like attire. The female pop singer is marketed to young teenage girls as a harlot and parents rush out to buy immodest clothes that emulate their whore-like idol.

The association of nakedness with shame and spiritual blindness is also found in the book of Revelation: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see" (3:18). The Biblical message with regard to nakedness is clear. It is something shameful, disgraceful, humiliating and disgusting. Only when a people are spiritually blind do they emulate the harlot in her appearance. One could make the case that the style of dress in modern America both inside and outside the churches indicates that judgment in a sense has come and that without repentance things will only get worse.

Fourth, the Bible regards a person as naked when they are only wearing their undergarments. This point is established by John 21:7: "Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, 'It is the Lord.' Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher coat (*ependutes*, only here in the NT) unto him, (for he was naked) and did cast himself into the sea." The word "naked" in this passage does not mean that Peter was without any

¹⁰ Walter A. Maier, *The Book of Nahum: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, 1977 [1959]), 307.

clothing whatsoever. Fishermen at that time would strip down to a loincloth or sleeveless tunic while they fished so their movements would not be impeded. “That *naked* often stands for slight clothing, needs no further demonstration.... Theophylact says, ‘a linen shirt, such as the Phoenician and Syrian fishermen were wont to wear.’”¹¹ There are two suggestions as to Peter’s girding himself before jumping in the water to walk to shore. One is that he tied up his fisher’s shirt to make it easier to move in water. The other is that he put his outer garment tightly around his waist to take it to shore.¹² From this passage we learn that wearing skimpy clothing around others of *the same sex* (e.g., in a gymnasium or private pool) is lawful. We also learn that skimpy clothing is regarded as a form of nakedness in Scripture. Therefore, modern swimwear and many popular ways of dress in our day are clearly inappropriate. (This reinforces what we have already noted with regard to Isaiah 47:2-3 and the baring of the thigh.)

Before we move to the issue of pants and women we would do well to pause and reflect on what we have learned from God’s Word and apply to our own situation in America. The Bible unequivocally rejects any form of dress that leaves the thighs exposed or reveals the buttocks. Moreover, Hebrew dress did not expose any part of the breasts. This would certainly include what is called “cleavage.” In addition (as we have already noted) clothing styles were loose-fitting, never form-fitting. Consequently, even when fully covered the shape of the breasts, thighs and buttocks were never revealed. Therefore, even though the type of dress worn in the days of our Lord is not worn today, we must emulate and imitate the modesty of their clothing. While cultures and styles change, that which causes persons of the opposite sex to lust does not change. What the holy prophets regarded as shameful, humiliating, disgraceful and a sign of judgment is now regarded attractive, stylish and a sign of prosperity. Generally speaking, Americans have been habitually dressing immodestly for many decades. What is disturbing is that with rare exceptions, professing Christians in our day dress immodestly just like everyone else. If churches are going to be serious about sanctification and the call to separation from this world, then this practice needs to change. This does not mean that we need to dress just like people in a former age (e.g., the 19th century prairie dresses and bonnets), but that we must

¹¹ E.W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, 1980 [1865]), 2:476.

¹² A number of commentators believe that Peter put on his outer garment and girded it in order to appear before Jesus properly dressed. It is highly unlikely however that Peter would put on his large wool robe before jumping into the water. Even with it girded it would have made his movement through the water highly difficult. In addition, Peter lived with Jesus for three and a half years. It is likely that Jesus had already seen Peter in his underwear or fishing outfit on a number of occasions. It is likely that the disciples left their bulky outer garments on shore and that Peter girded his fishing garment. The word translated “fisher’s coat” (KJV) (*Gk-ependutres*) is unusual. Thayer writes, “*an upper garment,...* Jn. Xxi.7, where it seems to demote a kind of linen blouse [i.e. a shirt] or frock which fishermen used to wear at their work” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977 (1901)], 230). A wet robe would make fishing difficult. Therefore, fishermen wore a shirt of light material to prevent sunburn, yet which left the legs free to get wet and jump into shallow waters. This means that having one’s legs exposed (thighs and all) was considered nakedness. (The New King James translation of this passage is poor and reflects an interpretive bias on the part of the translators.) Regarding nakedness in Scripture there is also the intriguing incident in Mark 14:51-52, “Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young man laid hold of Him, and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.” It is the general consensus of commentators that this young man had thrown something on hastily because he was awakened at a late hour and rushed out to be with Jesus. The word translated linen cloth or linen sheet is a single word (*sindon*) that indicates a fine fabric. Most outer garments (the cloak) were made of wool. Thus it is likely that he was either wrapped in a bed sheet or a tunic (i.e. an undergarment). Therefore, most commentators believe that this young man fled totally naked.

choose modern clothing that conforms to biblical standards of modesty. Christians need to be salt and light to the surrounding culture and society. This includes how we act and how we dress.

Chapter 2: Is It a Sin for Women to Wear Pants?

No discussion of modesty would be complete without a consideration of the debate over whether or not pants are forbidden for women. This issue is important because it will help us understand how the ethical principles of Scripture that define modesty, which are absolute and unchanging, are to be applied to styles of dress, which throughout history have been in flux and are frequently undergoing change. It will also help us deal with the application of biblical ethics to situations where concepts of what is proper or improper regarding dress in a society are essentially arbitrary or purely cultural. It is probably for this reason that there is so much misunderstanding and fallacious argumentation on this topic. As we study this issue, we will first examine the central passage in Scripture used to forbid cross dressing. Next, we will examine pants in different cultural and historical contexts. Then, we will interact with arguments that forbid pants on women in all circumstances. The central questions on this topic are: (1) the meaning of Deuteronomy 22:5; (2) are pants *always* an item of clothing that are masculine or only for men; (3) and, if pants can be a piece of clothing not solely restricted to men culturally or socially, are there kinds of pants that are modest for use with women?

Deuteronomy 22:5

The argument about whether it is sinful for a woman to wear pants is based primarily on Deuteronomy 22:5: “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God.” Regarding this verse, there are a number of things that merit our attention.

First, the command regarding women is very broad and extends to much more than clothing. The expression “anything that pertains to a man” includes not only clothing, but ornaments, armor, weapons, etc. (i.e. anything that is normally associated with men). The expression “that which pertains” normally specifies ownership of something (“peace offerings that pertain to the LORD”; Lev. 7:20; cf. 21) or being peculiar to something (e.g., “breastfeeding pertains to motherhood”). Unfortunately, both the New American Standard Bible (e.g., “A woman shall not wear man’s clothing”) and the New International Version (e.g., “A woman must not wear men’s clothing”) paraphrase this passage [i.e. 5a] and narrow the meaning to attire or garments. They translate 5a as an exact parallel to 5b where, in the case of a man, female garments are specified. This mistranslation misses an important aspect of the prohibition.

It is also noteworthy that the inspired writer uses *geber* for “man” instead of the much more common Hebrew term *ish*. Although *geber* is often simply a synonym of *ish*, its root meaning “to be strong” makes it a more suitable term for expressing that which is male about a man as an antonym of a woman. It is the word one would use of a valiant man, a warrior or a mighty man. It is the word that a Hebrew would use to describe what we call today “a man’s man.”

Second, given the broad nature of the command (“men’s things” or “anything that pertains to a man”) and the second clause where men are explicitly forbidden to wear women’s clothing, it is wrong to *limit* this prohibition (in 5a for women) to military armor and

implements.¹³ That is certainly included in the prohibition and may have even been the chief abuse by heathen women at that time, but a universal prohibition must not be limited without clear exegetical evidence from the immediate or broader context. Under no circumstances does the Bible sanction or allow cross dressing or transvestite behavior. It is a blatant transgression of the moral law.

Third, the practice of women wearing that which pertains to a man or a man wearing women's clothing is so wicked and offensive to God that those who practice such things are described as an "abomination unto God." This means that God regards such people as disgusting, abhorrent and repulsive. God who is holy and righteous detests such people. This same word (Hebrew, *towebah*) is used to describe homosexual behavior (Lev. 18:22; 20:13), idolatry (Deut. 7:25), premeditated fraud or theft in business (Prov. 11:1), habitual lying (Prov. 12:22), the worship of a rank hypocrite (Prov. 15:8; 21:27; Isa. 1:13) and the practice or lifestyle of wickedness in general (Prov. 15:9). Given this usage, those who attempt to connect the word "abomination" (*towebah*) only to cultic or ceremonial offenses are clearly off the mark. When Jehovah tells us that a certain practice or lifestyle makes a person an abomination before Him, it serves to emphasize the wickedness of that behavior. It is a strong warning to God's people to studiously avoid or shun such activities.

Some Obvious Applications

Before we delve into the issue of women and pants let us consider some of the easiest applications of this verse. One thing that it certainly forbids is the modern pro-feminist practice of dressing and placing women into roles that biblically, historically and culturally have been the domain of men. Although virtually every Reformed denomination has sheepishly accepted the American practice of women serving in combat roles in the military, this passage is strongly against it. Implements of war are for men of valor, not daughters, mothers or grandmothers. The same thing could be said of police officers (at least the ones with guns and/or batons), firemen and ministers of the gospel. A woman wearing the collar of a minister is an abomination in God's sight.

Another obvious application that has already been mentioned is cross dressing, transvestite behavior and attempts to be transgendered. God has ordained a clear distinction

¹³ This is a common interpretation of both Christian (e.g., Adam Clark, John Gill [primarily], A. D. H. Mayes, Cyrus Gordon) and Jewish (Jon-Jay Tilsen, Abraham Malamet, Maimonides) scholars. It is now known that in the worship of Ashteroth by the Canaanites, and Astarte by the Greeks, women would appear in worship wearing men's armor. Moreover, the Jewish Talmud cites Deuteronomy 22:5 as a proof text against women serving as warriors in the military. In Jewish Midrash literature, Jael kills Sisera with a tent peg (Jdg. 4:21), because it would have been inappropriate for her to use a sword which was a man's tool for warfare. Archeology has also revealed that in the ancient Middle East male sodomite temple prostitutes deliberately dressed and acted like women in their pagan cultic rituals. Transvestite men also would appear in female clothing and dance like women in the cult of Ishtar. It is quite clear that homosexuality, cross dressing and transvestite behavior were an integral aspect of at least some of the fertility cults that were popular in the ancient world. Having said all that, it is still an exegetical and logical fallacy to attempt to restrict biblical prohibitions on homosexuality, cross dressing or transvestite activities to only a pagan ritualistic context. This is precisely how modernists or "Christian" liberals have attempted to circumvent the Scripture's prohibitions against homosexuality, cross dressing and transvestite behavior. Biblical teaching is quite clear that such activities are an immoral abomination whether they are directly connected to idolatry or not. In addition, even if one holds the interpretation that Deuteronomy 22:5a is aimed directly at women wearing military implements, the application would certainly apply to every type of this behavior (e.g., women wearing men's clothing, dressing like a Levite, putting on the uniform of clergy, etc.).

between the sexes. Consequently, we must not do anything that would blur this distinction. For example, men should keep their hair cut short while women ought to let their hair grow long (1 Cor. 11:14). Men and women should never wear clothing that belongs to the opposite sex. Men's attire should reflect biblical concepts of masculinity while female clothing should reflect femininity. Believers should reject all attempts of the fashion industry and Hollywood to popularize unisex styles, transvestite or homosexual trends. Men should not wear makeup (e.g., David Bowie, Michael Jackson, rock stars of the 1970s and 80s, drag queens, etc.); put on women's blouses, underwear, skirts, shoes, etc.; wear feminine jewelry or earrings, etc.). It also certainly applies to so-called gender reassignment surgery where men and women go under the knife to have their genitalia mutilated in an attempt to mimic the opposite sex. God does not make exceptions in His holy law to satisfy the perverted lusts of sodomites, lesbians or the deluded, abominable body mutilators. You are to be what God created you to be and, therefore, you must never give in to a fallen, perverted imagination or wicked, unlawful desires.

Other Arguments against Pants on Women

Deuteronomy 22:5 is an important passage that merits serious thought. It, however, does not answer the question: "In modern day America are pants regarded as an item of clothing that belongs solely to men or have they become like the cloak or robe of biblical times that was worn by *both* men and women?" We will consider this question (which can only be answered from a historical, cultural and sociological perspective) in a moment. First, however, we would do well to briefly consider attempts at disproving the wearing of pants on women *directly* from Scripture (i.e. the attempt to find explicit proof texts and thus remove the issue from simply an *inference* or *application* of Deuteronomy 22:5 to modern culture). Obviously, if the Bible had an imperative such as: "women shall not wear pants" or "women must wear skirts or dresses" the debate over pants on females would not exist. The matter simply would be a question of submitting to the clear teaching of Scripture. But, as we shall see, the attempts at connecting dresses solely to women or pants solely to men from the *direct* teaching of God's Word is forced, inaccurate, arbitrary and fallacious. Note the following arguments.

One argument is based on the idea that the Greek word for "apparel" in 1 Timothy 2:9 (*katastole*) means "a long dress." If this word meaning is correct, then Paul is saying something very specific—that a woman's long dress must be modest. This is a major point of one long dress advocate who writes, "The Greek word for apparel in this text is *katastole*, meaning a long dress.... Therefore, women are instructed to wear modest long dresses (*kosmios katastole*). This *kosmios katastole* not only specifies that the article of clothing should be a dress, but also specifies that the dress should be a suitably long length" (J. Parnell McCarter, *Should Women Wear Long Dresses?*). This assertion raises the question: does *katasole* mean "a long dress"? The answer is, most certainly not. This argument confuses the word "dress" which means "attire," "clothing" or "garment," which is a *general term* that can be applied to many kinds of clothing, with the much more modern and *specific* term "dress," which refers to a *particular kind of clothing*. While one can certainly *apply* Paul's teaching to the rather modern kind of women's clothing called "a dress" (when Paul wrote 1 Timothy [c. A.D. 62-64] women wore cloaks or robe-like garments as did men, not dresses), it is exegetical malpractice to substitute a narrow, specific, rather modern meaning of a word for the broad or general meaning that Paul intended.¹⁴

¹⁴ The *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary Unabridged* recognizes this distinction. It says, "(1) that which is used as the covering or ornament of the body; clothes; garments, apparel...syn.—apparel, raiment, clothing,

It is for this reason that not one English translation renders *katastole* as “a long dress” (e.g., “attire” (Berkeley); “apparel” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, Young’s Literal Translation, Wuest, RSV); “clothes” (NASB, NEB, Jerusalem, NIV).

That Paul has in mind clothing, attire or apparel is also supported by most Greek scholars. Rengstorf says that *katastole* refers to either “demeanor” or “‘clothing’ as in Is. 61:3” [LXX].¹⁵ Thayer writes, “in biblical Greek twice, *a garment let down, dress, attire*: 1 Timothy 2:9.”¹⁶ *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* defines *katastole* as “demeanor, bearing, appearance” and says regarding 1 Timothy 2:9: “The parallel statement in v. 8 suggests their total demeanor, which can be expressed in clothing is in view.”¹⁷ Abbot-Smith says that in the Septuagint and New Testament *katastole* means “a garment, dress, attire.”¹⁸ Arnt and Gingrich give this definition: “*Deportment*, outward, as it expresses itself in clothing...as well as inward...and probably both at the same time.”¹⁹ W. E. Vine writes, “connected with *katastello*, to send or let down, to lower (*kata*, down, *stello*, to send), was primarily a garment let down; hence, dress, attire, in general (ep. *stole*, a loose outer garment worn by kings and persons of rank,—Eng., *stole*); 1 Tim. 2:9, ‘apparel.’”²⁰ Patrick Fairbairn says, “That *katastole* is properly taken in the sense of *apparel*, and not, as Ellicott would understand it, *deportment*,—including look and manner as well as dress,—there seems no just reason to doubt. It points by its etymology (from *katastello*) to the letting down of things about one’s person, adjusting or arranging them, then the apparel as so arranged (see Alford).”²¹ Hendriksen defines *katastole* as ‘becoming-attire.’”²² Clearly, the idea that Paul is speaking of “a long dress” is forced and dishonest “scholarship.”

Another attempt to use passages that are more specific than Deuteronomy 22:5 is based on the word “breeches.” It is argued that the word “breeches,” which in English can be a synonym for “trousers” is only used to describe men’s clothing in the King James Version of the Bible. There are two serious problems with this line of reasoning. First, the Hebrew word translated “breeches” is not simply restricted to men in Scripture, but also to the special Aaronic priesthood (e.g., Ex. 28:42; 39:28; Lev. 6:10; 16:4; Ezek. 44:18). Therefore, if one wants to argue for a biblical restriction on “breeches,” the restriction would cover not only women, but also the vast majority of men in the Old Covenant era and all men in the New Covenant era for Christ’s perfect work of redemption has forever put away the old Aaronic priesthood (cf. Heb. 9; Gal. 3:24-25).

clothes, vestments, garments. (2) the usual outer garment worn by women and girls consisting of a skirt and waist, generally in one garment” ([Collins World, 1978], 556). If Paul was talking about the narrow modern meaning, then not one person would have understood what he was saying for dresses were still centuries in the future.

¹⁵ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, eds., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 7:596.

¹⁶ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977 [1901]), 337.

¹⁷ Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 2:269.

¹⁸ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937), 239.

¹⁹ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (translators, adaptors, augmenters of Walter Baur’s work), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 419.

²⁰ W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming Revell, 1940), 63.

²¹ Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956 [1874]), 124.

²² William Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 [1955, 57]), 106.

Second, the Hebrew word translated “breeches” (*miknac*) does not refer to pants or trousers but to the special linen underwear, drawers, or loincloths worn by priests called to officiate at the high altar. The Hebrew word *miknac* is related to the word *mik-nawce* which refers to a hiding or concealing of something. While it is possible that this holy underwear was like our boxer shorts, we have no idea what it looked like. Blaiklock notes, “There is no reason to suppose that this covering had shaped trouser legs like a pair of shorts (Exod. 28:42; 39:28; Lev. 6:10; 16:4; Ezek. 44:18). Sewn ‘breeches,’ as distinct from this type of double loincloth, were the invention of riding nations, the Scythians and the Persians. The Romans later called the Gauls ‘trouserer’ (*Galli bracati*).”²³ Given the way sewn breeches developed in history, it is highly probable that the holy underwear was some kind of loincloth. Thus we see that the “breeches” argument is based on ignorance and must be rejected.

Pants and the Issue of Historical and Cultural Context

Having dispensed with some of the most common attempts to find specific prohibitions dealing with pants on women in Scripture, we now come to the difficult question of how to apply Deuteronomy 22:5 within one’s cultural context. This question is difficult because various nations have different histories with radically different clothing styles. What may be deemed feminine or appropriate for women in one society may be regarded as completely taboo in another. Likewise, what men may regard as effeminate and even a form of cross dressing in one nation may be perfectly acceptable in a different culture (e.g., a man wearing a kilt in America in the 1970s would have been mocked).

As we consider this issue, we need to answer a few questions before we come to a solid conclusion. First, have pants *universally* been regarded as a garment solely for men? If the answer is no, then at a minimum one cannot argue that under all circumstances and in every geographical location, women are forbidden to wear modest, feminine pants. Second, given the fact that clothing styles have radically changed over the past two thousand years, one must ask whether pants are still regarded as clothing that is *for men only* in Western nations (i.e. those nations where until the 20th century only men wore pants and women wore dresses or skirts). Are pants seen as an item only for men in the society at large or are they viewed as only for men by a few small religious groups *that have been taught that pants are still only for men*? A few other questions that will be helpful are: Why did women start wearing pants in America? Was it so they could look like men? Was it part of a transvestite, transgendered or lesbian conspiracy? Did women in the 1930s, 40s and 50s set out to destroy God’s created order for men and women? Or was it primarily for pragmatic reasons? After we examine these questions, we then need to consider whether it is possible for women to wear pants that are modest (i.e. are there styles of pants that are *loose-fitting*; that do not show off the women’s thighs and buttocks) and feminine.

In Western culture pants or trousers were regarded as men’s clothing. How and why this came to be one can only speculate. (Perhaps pants came into popular use with men because of their excellent qualities for movement and safety during labor.) In many parts of the world, however, pants were accepted for *both* men and women. In other words, they were not regarded as intrinsically male or masculine in nature. For example, “In China, women also wore jackets and pants, either alone or under a skirt, depending on social class. In Japan, both farming men

²³ E. M. Blaiklock, “Breeches” in Merrill C. Tenney, Gen. Ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 76), 1:652.

and women and the military elite wore pants, although of different styles.”²⁴ Pants were acceptable on women throughout Southeast Asia. Trousers were accepted on women in the early nomadic Eurasian cultures that were dependent on horses for survival. “Iranian Scythians, along with Achaemenid Persians were among the first to wear trousers, later introduced to modern Europe via either the Hungarians or Ottoman Turks.”²⁵ Pants were worn by Armenian, Anatolian (Asia Minor or Modern Turkey) and Bulgarian women (i.e. the loose-fitting *salvar*). A skirt, however, would hide a good portion of these pants.²⁶ After cotton was introduced to Africa (15th century), cotton pants were worn by women in Gabon.²⁷ In the ancient Celtic tribes women wore trousers primarily because of the cold weather. The Romans called these pants *braccae*. “*Braccae* is the Latin term for trousers and in this context is today used to refer to style of pants, made from wool and apparently invented by the ancient Celts. *Braccae* were typically made with a drawstring, and tended to reach from just above the knee at the shortest, to the ankles at the longest, with lengths generally increasing in Celtic tribes living further north. When the Romans first encountered the *Braccae*, they thought them to be effeminate (Roman men typically wore tunics, which were one-piece outfits terminating at or above the knee—skirt-like). Therefore, the Roman soldier’s society considered trousers to be women’s clothes at first and the knee-length tunic to be masculine. However, *Braccae* eventually became popular among Roman legionaries stationed in cooler climates to the north of Italy.”²⁸

From this brief survey we can conclude that pants on women are not something intrinsically immoral or against “natural law”; but rather their appropriateness for women has

²⁴ Melissa Leventon, Ed., *What People Wore When: A Complete Illustrated History of Costume from Ancient Times to the Nineteenth Century for Every Level of Society* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2008), 185.

²⁵ http://www.lastgeneration.us/pants_question.htm, 1.

²⁶ See *What Women Wore When*, 221, 255.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 262.

²⁸ http://www.lastgeneration.us/pants_question.htm, 1. In the middle ages there was some use of trousers while “hose” or “hosiery” dominated men’s and women’s leg coverings. The *Encyclopedia Americana* says, “Early History.—Hose was the term used to designate a leg covering adopted by Roman soldiers from the barbarians of northern Europe, and worn by both men and women after the establishment of the Byzantine Empire. It was used synonymously with *braccae* (AS. broc or brec) meaning breeches or trousers, by some commentators, thus creating confusion in regard to the fit and length of the leg covering worn in Europe from the 4th to the 14th century. The earliest works of art to depict leg coverings are (1) an ivory diptych of the 5th or 6th century recording the life of St. Paul, which shows some men in long loose leg garments with knee-length tunics, (2) a miniature of the 9th century showing Charles the Bald (Charles I, k. of France) with tight leg coverings, cross-gartered, and beside him two men with tight leg coverings banded at the knee, and (3) a miniature, c. 1000 A.D., of the legend of John the Baptist, showing a man in loose trousers that reach well below the knee, tucked into tight socks. The words *breeches* (AS. brec) and *trousers* (Celtic) mean a covering for the buttocks, while the French word *chausses*, indicating ‘close fitting,’ means both hose and breeches; the word *hose* is Anglo-Saxon and Danish. The earliest form of breeches, said to have been universally worn in northern Europe until 1300 A.D. was a piece of cloth put on like a baby’s diaper, a kind of loin cloth such as was worn by Mahatma Gandhi. It is probable, especially in the southern part of Europe, only hose were worn with *long* tunics, while with *short* tunics both trousers and hose were worn from the 4th to the end of the 14th century. Hose, tailored to fit the leg, were at first knee length and held up by a garter. When plate armor (c. 1390) demanded a close-fitting undergarment, hose were lengthened to cover thighs and buttocks and were tied to the waist or doublet. They were separate stockings, not joined at the crotch until after 1400, and were again separate stockings after 1500 when worn with trunks and called *nether stocks*. Although hose were invented for men, women soon adopted knee-length hose. There is a manuscript drawing (c. 1307-1327) of a woman holding hose in her hand ready to put on, and Chaucer, in his late 14th century *Canterbury Tales*, wrote, ‘her hosen were of fine scarlet red, ful strait y-tyed.’” ([New York: Americana Corporation, 1953]14:425). It is noteworthy that although hose were first developed and worn by men, they became accepted and popular among women. Today “hose” are (under normal circumstances) exclusively a female form of attire.

been an issue determined by tradition and culture. Thus, we even encounter the very masculine Roman soldiers in their *skirts* refusing to consider pants at first because they regarded them as a female style of dress. In addition, we see that pants on women were never an attempt to appear as men, blur the distinction between the sexes, or foster a transvestite worldview. Instead, it is apparent that trousers were viewed as a practical tool for living. They were better for riding horses, working and enduring cold climates (Eskimo women have never worn skirts or dresses. If they did they would not survive their bitter environment). Pants were better suited or more useful than dresses for movement, work, safety and protection from the elements. Given this information, at a minimum one should avoid absolutizing 19th and early 20th century western concepts of pants on women and imposing them on other non-western nations and cultures.

As we look to pants in the west we will see that they did not become predominate over “hosiery” with tunics, shirts or gowns until after the 16th century. Early pants or breeches tended to be fairly tight and were usually tucked into long socks or boots. In the neo-classical period (the early 19th century) they came to more resemble our modern pants because the colonial style of pants tucked into hose or socks began to go out of fashion. By the 1830s pants are virtually identical to what we wear today. Sailors wore baggy pants in the 17th and 18th centuries and the practice of wearing baggy pants continued in the U.S. Navy well into the twentieth century.²⁹ In 1873 blue jeans were invented by Jacob Davis and Levi Strauss. Jeans rapidly became the pants of choice for miners and cowboys throughout the American West.

Throughout this period women did not wear pants and, therefore, in Europe and America pants came to be defined as men’s clothing. This view, however, has changed over the last one hundred years or so and now pants are regarded as appropriate for both sexes. What is important to know is that this historical change of attitude was based primarily on pragmatic considerations (i.e. safety, freedom of movement) and not because of feminism or a desire to look like men. This assertion is supported by following historical considerations.

The first women to wear pants in America (who were not Indians) were young women who lived and worked on ranches in the 19th century. They had to ride horses and this could only be done safely and comfortably in pants. “The Wigan pit brow girls scandalized Victorian society by wearing trousers, rolled up to the waist to keep them out of the way.”³⁰ During World War 1 many women were asked to work in factories because of the great surge of men into the military. For safety reasons, they wore their hair pulled back and put on loose-fitting pants instead of dresses and skirts. Around the same time women began to wear pant-style pajamas for sleeping. In 1913 a French designer attempted to capitalize on a popular opera (*Scheherazade*) by designing wide-leg trousers for women called “harem pants.” He apparently believed what was acceptable for women in Eastern cultures may become popular in the West. During the 1930s it may have been feminism or simply a desire to be stylish and different that led some famous actresses (e.g., Katherine Hepburn and Marlene Dietrich) to wear tailored slacks in their movies. During the 1930s advertisements for feminine styled “women’s pants” began appearing in women’s fashion magazines. In 1935 Levi’s jeans, designed solely for women, were first featured in Vogue Magazine. It was during the 1930s that pants began to be accepted for sporting

²⁹ Denim trousers were invented in Italy during the Renaissance and grew in popularity throughout the 16th century. They were marketed in the harbor of Genoa and were adopted by the Genoese navy. The pants were durable, comfortable and good in wet conditions. They were deliberately worn baggy so they could easily be rolled up when swabbing the deck. Denim eventually became popular with sailors throughout the world. Interestingly, the men on Columbus’ voyage that discovered America wore denim pants.

³⁰ http://www.lastgeneration.us/pants_question.htm.

activities (e.g., golf, tennis, horseback riding, bicycling, hiking). From World War 1 through the late 1930s there was only a gradual acceptance of pants on women. This gradual acceptance was accelerated with World War 2 and the massive influx of young women into defense industries. It was not safe to wear skirts around heavy machinery or when welding metal plate to a battle ship. After the war pants were widely accepted for women as casual wear (working around the house, going to the park or beach or doing a little shopping). In the 1960s and beyond as society became less formal, the pattern of men in suits and ties and women in dresses became more and more replaced by casual wear for both sexes. By the twenty-first century women in the United States wear pants far more often than dresses or skirts. While some women during this period probably wore pants to make a feminist statement (e.g., Katherine Hepburn and Emilia Earhart were notable feminists) most simply accepted the change of styles without much thought.

A brief history of how pants came to be the common dress for both men and women reveals that their gradual acceptance in the west, first for men and then much later for women, was never an attempt to blur the sexes or promote transvestite behavior. The Roman soldiers were slow to adopt pants because they considered trousers to be for women since Celtic females wore them. In their cultural context or robe, skirt or cloak was associated with masculinity *when worn by men*. In the twentieth century women were slow to accept trousers because, in their cultural context, pants were by and large considered clothing for men. Now that pants are no longer associated solely with men, it is no more biblical or logical to condemn a modest, feminine use of pants by women than it is to condemn Romans soldiers for switching from skirts to pants in ancient Briton.

In the *modern* Western world pants are not something “that pertains to a man.” They are a kind of clothing style that evolved and changed over time just like all other styles. They are not like armor and implements of war that *always* pertain to a man. At one time their use on women was inappropriate in the same manner that man in our modern culture would be considered out of line if they wore Jewish dress-like robes or skirts. We must be careful to never compromise biblical principles of modesty and propriety, while rejecting traditions or changing cultural conventions as ethical absolutes. In fact, if one absolutizes the social convention or tradition of women *never* wearing pants but *always* wearing dresses, then if consistent, he would have to argue that all men and women are required to wear the same attire of the patriarchs, holy prophets, Jesus Christ and his apostles (i.e. dress-like cloaks, not pants). If one is going to absolutize the socially acceptable styles of one era in history (e.g., the Renaissance, or Victorian or early 20th century), then why not choose the biblical era? Why focus on the 19th century? While we commend our Reformed brothers who are dress-only advocates for their rejection of feminism and promotion of covenant headship, we do not think they have carefully thought through their position. Pastors and elders cannot be expected to discipline women who have refused to uphold a cultural tradition from the past.³¹ While we can certainly praise and emulate

³¹ This issue of church discipline and pants raises another thorny question. What does a denomination do on the mission field in far-off lands where women have been wearing pants for thousands of years? Does one force them to apply biblical modesty to their cultural styles of dress; or, does one impose 19th century European concepts of appropriate clothing styles on their culture? In other words, does one force women to get rid of their pants in favor of long prairie-style dresses? This second option raises other questions relating to practicality. What about the problem of insects (e.g., mosquitoes); or, a frigid climate? There are areas of this planet where dresses are simply not practical. Does the church impose dresses on these cultures? Does it force natives to move to a more moderate climate to avoid insect bites or freezing to death? Those who absolutize the old Western cultural concept that pants are only for men must come to grips with these kinds of questions. Such questions reveal the wisdom of Scripture and the pitfalls of legalism.

the modesty of a former era, that does not mean that we must dress in the exact same attire as a former century.

All of this raises the question: “Are there modest forms of pants for women or modest ways that pants can be worn by women?” Yes, indeed there are. Previously, in our discussion of nakedness and modesty as defined by Scripture we learned that it is inappropriate for women (or men) to reveal their buttocks and thighs to a person of the opposite sex who is not a spouse. With this teaching in mind one can safely conclude that *tight* or *form-fitting pants* should not be worn by women (or men). Pants that reveal the shape of the buttocks and/or thighs are forbidden by implication. Therefore, women have a choice. They can either wear loose fitting or baggy pants that will not cause lust, or they can wear form fitting pants with a long sweater, or shirt, or coat that completely covers their buttocks and upper thighs to conceal them. Given these biblical restrictions, pants may not be as popular among professing Christians as they were when modesty in dress was largely ignored. But in any case, Christian modesty minus legalistic restrictions allows believing women to wear pants for activities where dresses and skirts are most inconvenient (horseback riding, working around the house, gardening, riding a bike, snow skiing, hiking, etc.). In addition, this position of modesty without legalism will enable missionaries and foreign presbyteries to do their job without an unreasonable imposition of Western culture.³²

Other Common Objections against Pants on Women

In order to fine tune our goal of Christian modesty in dress that is not legalistic and can be defended by Scripture, we will interact with some other common arguments against pants on women.

The first argument is that male and female clothing must be distinct. Therefore, we should wear clothing that makes our gender distinctions *as clear as possible*. Consequently, the logical way to carry out this principal in our culture is for women only to wear skirts and dresses while men stick to the practice of wearing pants or trousers. No one will ever be confused if we all go back to the practices of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, the distinction between dresses for women and pants for men is so clear, that in America separate bathrooms for

³² The position that modest forms of pants are acceptable to Christian women in the 21st century will no doubt be viewed as a sinful compromise with our degenerate culture by some. Others may view this position as simply an excuse for an existing practice popular with churches today. The truth of the matter is that this author is mainly interested in this topic for three reasons: First, is there enough biblical evidence to warrant church discipline when women wear pants? If pants on women are a form of cross-dressing or transvestite behavior, then their use would be a very serious, scandalous sin worthy of censure and even excommunication if necessary. Those who hold to the position that pants on women are a violation of Deuteronomy 22:5 must (in order to be consistent) forbid their use in *all circumstances and cultures*. They must treat pants on women the same way as a man wearing a dress, nylons, high heels and makeup. After a careful examination of the Bible and the history of pants, we believe that such a position is untenable. Second, virtually any conservative Reformed pastor or elder who has served for many years will run into families that argue vehemently against pants on women in all circumstances. Therefore, this issue cannot be ignored or swept under the table, but must be examined carefully under the light of Scripture. Either the people who argue against pants are right and we must repent and thank them for bringing this matter to our attention; or, they are wrong and thus must be corrected for seeking to impose their legalistic views on the church. There can be no middle ground on this issue. Third, immodest dress among professing Christians in our nation is a serious, widespread problem. Therefore, we must study the Scriptures and draw out biblical principles on modesty and apply them sensibly within our churches. If we focus on issues that do not have biblical warrant and that cannot be proved, we are not only guilty of legalism, but actually may hurt the biblical case for modesty by looking irrational, petty and foolish on this important issue.

men and women are designated by a sign with a stick figure with a dress for one and a stick figure wearing pants for the other. Think of the great confusion that would occur if all bathrooms had stick figures with pants.

This kind of reasoning which we call, “the not different enough” argument, sounds pretty good, but suffers from two serious problems. First, it makes a clever, subtle jump from the biblical principle that there ought to be a distinction between men and women’s clothing to the human addition, “it must be *as clear as possible*.”³³

One may not think there is much difference between the two positions, but actually there is a great difference. If we hold the position, “as clear as possible,” then why stop with dresses and pants? Why not make matters even clearer by insisting on certain colors for men only that are often associated with masculinity (e.g., blue, black, dark green) while restricting women’s clothing to colors associated with femininity (e.g., pink, yellow, lavender)? Why not put blue top hats on all men and pink scarves on all women? These suggestions are absurd and unnecessary and that is the point.

Second, the idea that “it must be as clear as possible” explicitly contradicts the clear testimony of Scripture. When God made coverings for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21), did He make Eve a dress while fashioning a pair of pants for Adam? No, He made them tunics or cloaks (*ketonet*). The Hebrew word is the *same* for both Adam and Eve and this word indicates a robe or long shirt-like garment. They were modestly dressed by God; but they were obviously not made as distinct as possible. In addition, in our study of the dress of godly Jews in biblical times we saw that both men and women wore a tunic (Heb. *ketonet*, Gk. *chiton*) as an under garment next to the skin and a robe or cloak (Heb. *kesut*, Gk. *himaton*) over the tunic. From Scripture and pictures on pottery and monuments, one cannot see any major difference between the male and

³³ This is essentially the main argument of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. In *The Young People’s Magazine* one of their ministers writes, “Of course, as children of the Reformation, we know that it is not good to follow traditions blindly, and this is where it is important to remember that wearing skirts is only a cultural practice which preserves the biblical principle. But if we take the biblical principle seriously, and are determined to make the gender distinction as clear as possible through what we wear, then we have few other options left to us in our culture for putting the principle into practice, other than by continuing to resort to skirts for women and trousers for men (May 2007; vol. 72; no. 5, p. 13). Note that this statement does acknowledge that the wearing of skirts “is only a cultural practice.” The author makes the assumption that taking this principle seriously entails making gender distinction *as clear as possible*. But, as we noted above, both God in Genesis 3:21 and Jesus Christ (the Son of God incarnate) did not make it *as clear as possible* by abandoning the cloak for men in favor of pants or trousers. While we reject unisex styles of dress (e.g., the “butch” lesbian or cross-dressing sodomite), we do not reject modest, feminine style pants for women.

Another main argument of *The Young People’s Magazine* is that women want to wear pants because they want to be worldly; they want to adopt the world’s the world’s fashions. It reads, “The other main point is the reasoning behind our questioning the skirts/trousers tradition. Harsh as it may sound, if the biggest source of difficulty with wearing skirts comes either from a disrespectful challenge to our parents’ authority, or from a preference for getting as close as possible to worldly fashions, then it should be clear enough that our reasons for disliking skirts are very misguided” (Ibid). This reasoning is simply a case of *assuming* that women who wear pants want to get “as close as possible to worldly fashions.” To prove this statement is true, the author first would have to demonstrate that pants on women are a deliberate attempt to look like men and subvert God’s ordained separation of the sexes at creation. This has not been done and contradicts the long history of pants in the world and even the West. Second, the author would have to know the heart and motives of all women who have worn pants. Does the female Christian who wears dresses most of the time, but puts on a pair of old sweat pants to go into the garden to harvest potatoes do this because she wants to look like heathen women who wear “worldly fashions”? The author could respond that he was only presenting a few unbiblical reasons for wearing pants. But, that fact that the Free Presbyterians do not believe pants on women is permissible under any circumstances indicates he apparently believes that evil motives *always* lie behind the wearing of pants.

female cloak. Perhaps women decorated or wore their cloaks in a different manner. It seems, however, that men and women were primarily distinguished by their hair, head coverings and adornments. In any case, the “as different as possible” argument contradicts the inspired Word of God and must be rejected.

Another common argument against pants on women is what we call guilt by association. It is argued that the acceptance of pants on women coincides with the acceptance of women into the work force and the feminist desire among women to be more and more like men. Thus, it is argued that if we allow women to wear pants, then we implicitly are approving of feminism and women rejecting their biblical duty of being “keepers at home” (Tit. 2:5). This argument is clever but must be rejected for two reasons. First, it is guilty of projecting the feminist mindset that was not widespread among women in the United States until at least the 1960s and 70s back into women’s minds throughout the whole twentieth century. While feminism in America goes all the way back at least to the 1850s, the vast majority of women accepted the role of a stay-at-home mother until the 1960s. Women in the workforce throughout the late 19th century and much of the 20th had virtually nothing to do with feminism. It arose because of the advance of industrialization at the same time the number of people involved in agriculture greatly diminished. Throughout this period, pants on women were rare and were generally speaking only used in industries where safety made them a necessity. The guilt by association argument assumes that most women adopted them as an anti-family, anti-Christian social statement and that is simply not true. Women moved into the workforce because churches were not teaching the whole counsel of God, in particular covenant headship.

Second, for the guilt by association argument to be valid or sound one would have to demonstrate that pants on women was a direct or at least indirect cause or effect of feminism and the destruction of the biblical concept of the family. The feminists of the 19th century and early 20th century all wore dresses down to their ankles and would have (as far as outward appearance goes) fit into any conservative church gathering. (In fact, many early feminists were professing Christians.) If one automatically or even generally associates pants on women to a feminist motive or sinful desire to be like the world, then he could also argue that the use of boats is evil or worldly because of their association with pirates.

Chapter 3: Modesty and Extravagance

Thus far we have considered modesty in dress from the perspective of clothing that causes lust and attire that is appropriate for one’s sex. Biblical modesty, however, also refers to a rejection of ostentatious, excessively showy or extravagant clothing. This point is established from the secondary meaning of the Greek word (*kosmios*) and the context of the word in 1 Timothy 2:9: “[T]hat the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but which is proper to women professing godliness, with good works.” In Greco-Roman society of the first century, many women were obsessed with attaining extravagance in dress. Such a style was exceptionally costly and was to an extent expected of the upper classes. Coupled with this obsession was an attitude of pride and superiority that went with an ostentatious appearance. This “heart attitude” essentially said, “Look at me. I am impressive. I am better than you. I am great. I have arrived.” This ungodly attitude has been common throughout history. In our day, high school students (especially females) try to out dress each other. In our culture many women spend an inordinate amount of time and money on their appearance. Given this common problem with women

throughout recorded history Paul counters such thinking with a call to godliness and humility that results in modest apparel.

As we study the issue of modesty as it applies to the avoidance of ostentatious attire, there are a number of things to keep in mind. First, the Bible does not *explicitly* define extravagance in clothing. Therefore, one must carefully consider a number of passages that are related to this topic and make logical deductions based on the analogy of Scripture. This will require wisdom and sanctified common sense. Second, like our previous topic, there are some unbiblical extremes when it comes to modesty and extravagant attire. On the one hand, there are professing Christians who blindly follow the world's lead in this area. They spend money like there is no tomorrow on the latest fashions and dress completely beyond their station in life to impress their friends and neighbors. (While attending seminary in a large city, this author was surprised to find young men who lived in decrepit row houses wearing thirty dollar a pair socks, three hundred dollar Italian leather shoes and eight hundred dollar suits. Clearly, for some, *status* and *ego* take precedence over economic common sense or properly providing for their own families). On the other hand, there are those who teach that apparel must *always* be plain or even unattractive. There have been Anabaptist sects that forbid the wearing of colors other than black, grey or white. Others have forbidden embroidery or even buttons. In history, there have been those who have forbidden all lace, the wearing of any jewelry and any use of makeup on women. When one reads various monographs on this topic, one often will find neo-platonic presuppositions or the quoting of famous churchmen from the past who either give their personal opinion with no exegesis or who contradict the clear teaching of the passage because of their own assumptions. Given the erroneous concepts of Christian modesty and extravagance, we need to be careful to draw our principles solely from Scripture instead of imposing our presuppositions or ecclesiastical traditions upon the text. As we do this we will consider clothing and the question of whether 1 Timothy 2:9 and 1 Peter 3:3-4 teach a complete prohibition on jewelry or only an ostentatious abuse of jewelry.

The key to understanding the question of attire is to compare a few key passages and interpret them together. In 1 Timothy 2:9 Paul helps us understand what he means by extravagant, immodest dress on women by prohibiting costly, elaborate hair styles (In Greco-Roman society wealthy women would have gold thread woven into their hair with things like pearls attached to the hair with pins), ornate jewelry (jewelry will be considered below) and extremely expensive clothing (“costly clothing” [NKJV], “expensive clothes” [NIV, NEB, Berkeley, Jerusalem Bible], “costly array” [KJV], “costly raiment” [NASB, Wuerst], “garments of great price” [Young’s Literal Translation]). The word “costly” (*poluteles*) means “extremely expensive.” It is primarily used to describe the very end or limit of something (from *polus* much, *telos*, revenue).³⁴ In Mark 14:3 the same word is used to describe an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard that was poured over Jesus’ head. Nard was among the most costly ointments in the ancient world. (The oil used in spikenard was imported from India.) In verse 5 we are told the spikenard was worth “three hundred denarii” which at that time was equivalent to a year’s wages. Paul is clearly talking about exceptionally expensive clothing. A Christian woman is not to waste her money on very costly clothes and she must not even crave or lust after such items.

In the first century women wore robes or mantles that, in structure, were similar to a men’s cloak or toga. The price of the woman’s robe would be determined by the quality of the fabric used, the expertise of workmanship, the amount of ornamentation (costly garments were

³⁴ See W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 244-245. Thayer writes, “very valuable, of great price” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 530).

richly decorated) and the amount of color variation. Paul is instructing women to avoid showiness; to shun the world's vain materialism and cult of beauty. Believers are not to spend an inordinate amount of time and money on how they look and must reject an ostentatious display of wealth, sensuality or excess. Christians are to manifest moderation in dress and adornments. Their outward appearance must reflect their spiritual and moral qualities. While Paul is not telling believers to take a vow of poverty and dress like ascetics, he wants to make sure that their attire does not reflect the world's obsession with money, power, or self-glorification. Thus, in contrast with worldly women who focus on elaborate jewelry and expensive, fancy clothes, Paul wants Christian women to wear clothing "which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works" (1 Tim. 2:10). Believers want to draw attention to Christ, not to their own ego, wealth or social status. Paul's thought brings to mind the wonderful teaching of 1 Peter 3:3, 4: "Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."

Since 1 Timothy 2:9 has often been interpreted to teach that women must always wear inexpensive, cheap, plain or unattractive clothing, we need to interpret it in light of Proverbs 31:22 which describes the clothing of a godly, productive woman: "She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple." The word for "fine linen" (*sheshiy*) indicates a high quality white linen product, not cotton or silk (the word for silk is *meshiy* which does not appear until Ezekiel 16:10, 13). The word translated purple (*argaman*) refers to a very expensive red/purple dye. The most valuable purple garments were imported from Tyre and Sidon. The fact that this woman wears fine linen and purple indicates that she can afford high quality, expensive clothing. This clothing was not immodest or excessive, given the high position of her husband (he is an elder or political leader in the gate [v. 23]) and her high economic status. The inspired author wants us to note that God has blessed this godly wife and clothed her in attire fit for a queen. Her clothing is not cheap or plain, yet conforms to the New Testament rule of modesty. Her attire was appropriate to her station in life without being excessive or drawing too much attention to herself. While it is true that her main concern must always first be on her spiritual, inward qualities (cf. 1 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 3:4), that does not mean that neglecting her outward appearance or looking cheap or poverty-stricken is a virtue. Her prosperity, which flows from her love of God and His commandments, is seen in her respectable outward appearance. As Matthew Henry notes, "She has rich clothes and puts them on well."³⁵

Ironically, Anabaptist women and ascetics who see holiness in drab dress and who make concerted efforts to be homely or who look like they just stepped out of a time machine are themselves guilty of violating the spirit of these passages. Their drabness and odd dress draw attention to themselves. Their bizarre appearance, whether intentional or not, turns them into a display. Their concept of modesty which is informed primarily by human tradition and philosophy turns modesty into a form of immodesty.

Chapter 4: The Biblical Teaching on Jewelry

We have made jewelry a separate topic for discussion for two reasons. First, there are certain Anabaptist "holiness" sects (e.g., the anti-trinitarian, heretical United Pentecostal Church) and even a few Reformed groups (e.g., the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland) that teach that

³⁵ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, n. d.), 3:976.

Peter (1 Pet. 3:3) and Paul (1 Tim. 2:9) have declared an *absolute prohibition* regarding the wearing of jewelry in their epistles. For example, a self-appointed apologist for the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland writes, "...in the Apostolic era plainness and simplicity of attire was commanded as a general rule, and the wearing of ornamental jewelry was expressly forbidden."³⁶ "[T]he Puritans of England and America, as well as the Church of Scotland (starting with Knox) prohibited jewelry."³⁷ Given this interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9 and 1 Peter 3:3, we need to study the word of God in order to see if we should ban all ornamental jewelry. We either need to adopt the no jewelry position and apply it; or, we need to expose the absolute prohibition position as legalism, as nothing more than a human tradition imposed on the sacred text. In this monograph we will be doing the latter.

Second, there are so many passages in Scripture that contradict the absolute prohibition position that this topic needed its own chapter. Given the abundant biblical evidence, we will demonstrate beyond a shadow of doubt that Peter and Paul only condemn an excessive, worldly, ostentatious display of jewelry. The principle that "Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture" is one of the most important rules of sacred hermeneutics. It is wrong and irrational to interpret a passage in a manner that contradicts the clear teaching of *many other passages* in God's Word. Those who do so (as we shall see) really have only two options. They can either twist the meaning of such passages in order to attempt to harmonize them with their presuppositions and fallacious understanding of 1 Timothy 2:9 and 1 Peter 3:3; and/or they can attempt to circumvent them by resorting to a dispensational understanding of the contrary sections of Scripture. In other words, God permitted jewelry in the Old Covenant era and even spoke favorably about it, but in the New Covenant era He condemns it as unethical and bans it. Such argumentation we will see is desperate, irrational and unscriptural. A brief survey of jewelry and its use in Scripture will prove this point.

Precious metals and jewels are first mentioned in the pre-fall description of Eden and the surrounding lands: "Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and because four riverheads. The name of the first is Pishon, it is the one which goes around the whole land of Havilah; where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there" (Gen. 2:10-12). Note, that in this narrative Moses deliberately points out that the land of Havilah has supplies of precious metal and stones. He also points out that the gold is good (i.e. precious, excellent, fine). Moses points to the unique quality of gold and precious stones because he wanted his readers to understand that the land was blessed by God, valuable and magnificent. The pre-fall environment was one of generosity and splendor. If Adam had not fallen, the whole human race would have used precious metals and gemstones as a tool and resource for godly dominion. "God had provided man with all the ingredients for a rich life, but He had also made work mandatory to the legitimate gaining of wealth."³⁸

The first account of jewelry being used by godly people is in Genesis 24 when the holy patriarch Abraham sent his senior or chief servant (v. 2) into Mesopotamia (Hebrew, *Aram Naharaim*) to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac: "Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, for all his master's goods were in his hand. And he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor...Now it was, when the camels had finished drinking, that the man took a golden nose ring weighing half a shekel, and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels of gold, and said, 'Whose daughter are you?'...And she said, 'The daughter of

³⁶ J. Parnell McCarter, "On Jewelry and Attire" in *Puritan News Weekly* (4, 06, 04), 11.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 5.

³⁸ Rousas John Rushdoony, *Genesis* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2002), 27.

Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the nose ring on her nose and the bracelets on her wrists. And I bowed my head and worshipped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, who led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of my master's brother for his son...Then the servant brought out jewelry of silver, jewelry of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother" (vs. 10, 22, 47, 48, 53).

In this narrative Moses points out that the goods the servant took with him belonged to Abraham ("his master's goods" v. 10). Certainly, the motive behind this whole endeavor was godly. Abraham was determined to make sure that under no circumstances was his son to marry a Canaanite woman. Abraham was a wealthy man and thus provided his servant with impressive bridal gifts. These beautiful gifts of jewelry were bestowed as a direct answer to prayer for an intervention of special providence (vs. 12-14, 47). After the jewelry was given to Rebekah, the servant immediately worships Jehovah for His special guidance in this important mission (v. 48) and asks for further guidance (v. 49). Leupold notes this servant's devotion to God: "True, the outcome of the enterprise as granted to this man in answer to his prayer was as marvelous a display of divine providence, perhaps, as ever a mortal witnessed. Such mercy called for acknowledgment. But he that will make his acknowledgment as freely and as openly as does this man is both a devout and a courageous soul."³⁹

This narrative raises a number of questions regarding the jewelry issue. If the wearing of jewelry is in all cases worldly and sinful, then why does Abraham own jewelry and why does he give it as gifts to the people of God? If Abraham was ignorant regarding jewelry, then why didn't God correct him? In addition, the narrative indicates that Abraham's head servant was both wise and godly. Was he ignorant and guilty of sin also? For these and other reasons the vast majority of interpreters do not regard 1 Timothy 2:9 and 1 Peter 3:3 as teaching an absolute prohibition on jewelry. As the great Reformed Baptist scholar John Gill notes, "*Or gold, or pearls, or costly array*: not that the apostle forbids all use or wear of such things by proper persons, whose circumstances would admit of it, and upon proper occasions, and at proper times: certain it is, that ear-rings and bracelets of gold, and jewels set in silver and gold, and raiment, costly raiment, were sent by Abraham, and given to Rebekah, and wore by her, who was a woman professing godliness: so the church in Psal. xlv. 9, 13, 14. Though in figurative expressions..."⁴⁰

If this were the only passage in the Bible that shows the godly owning, giving and wearing jewelry, then perhaps one could explain it away. But there are many passages that speak positively of jewelry. In Genesis 41:42 we read, "Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck." If wearing jewelry were a sin, would Joseph, who was probably the holiest man on earth at that time, accept and wear jewelry? In Job 42:11 after Job's ordeal was over and he was vindicated by God the account notes, "Then all his brothers, all his sisters, and all those who had been his acquaintances before, came to him...and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversity that the LORD had brought upon him. Each one gave him a piece of silver and each a ring of gold." Job received gifts of money and jewelry from God's people without complaint, rebuke or guilt. Like Abraham and Joseph before him, Job was known as an exceptionally godly man ("Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" [Job 1:8]). It is rather obvious that Job did not consider jewelry immoral.

³⁹ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1942), 671.

⁴⁰ John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809), 3:285.

In the book of Proverbs Solomon, writing under divine inspiration, compares jewelry to a sanctified ear that listens to and heeds godly instruction: “Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuke to an obedient ear” (Prov. 25:15). He also speaks positively of a lawful use of jewelry in Song of Solomon 1:10-11 when he describes his bride: “Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments of gold with studs of silver” (cf. 5:11-14; 7:1). If jewelry is sinful, then why did the Holy Spirit record this and place this poetry in the Bible as something positive? Would God use something immoral as a metaphor to describe the love of Christ for His church? Perish the thought!

God speaking through Isaiah described the gathering of God’s people unto Zion with the metaphor of a bride who binds ornaments upon herself for decoration: “As I live declares the LORD, ‘You will surely put on all of them as jewels and bind them on as a bride’” (49:18 NASB). In Isaiah 61:10 the Holy Spirit places beautiful poetic expressions of joy for the blessings of salvation on the lips of the true Israel, the elect, the church of God: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” Once again, we ask the question, would Jehovah who is righteous and holy use something wrong, immoral or sinful as a metaphor to describe something right, good and holy? Does it make sense to essentially argue that the Bible teaches two completely contradictory positions on jewelry? Must we impose the absurd notion that one must interpret the poetic passages above as saying: “Look church how much Jesus Christ loves you. He is going to make you beautiful by adorning you with gold and silver and placing jewelry around your neck. By the way, just make sure you do not put any jewelry on your wife because it’s a sin and I hate it. It is wicked, so avoid it completely!”

Such a statement is completely absurd and that is the point. If you believe that wearing jewelry is a sin, then you should think about the logical absurdity of your position next time you read Ezekiel 16:8-14:

“When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time *was* the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,” says the Lord GOD. “Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing *was of* fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate *pastry of* fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it *was* perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,” says the Lord GOD.

What is particularly illuminating about this chapter of Ezekiel is how poetic metaphor shifts over to the stark reality of Israel’s betrayal of God through idolatry in the following verses:

“But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who *would have* it. You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them. *Such* things should not happen, nor be. You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with

them. You took your embroidered garments and covered them, and you set My oil and My incense before them. Also My food which I gave you—the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey *which* I fed you—you set it before them as sweet incense; and *so* it was,” says the Lord GOD (vs. 15-19).

These verses are intended to be taken literally, not figuratively. Note that Jehovah has absolutely no problem with the fact that the Jews took God’s gold and silver and made themselves beautiful jewelry. If making or wearing jewelry were a sin, this would be a perfect place for God to express His displeasure with such behavior. But, instead, Jehovah *only condemns* the Jews for turning their jewelry into idols.

The Old Testament teaching on gold, silver, gemstones and jewelry is consistent and unambiguous. Precious metals and gemstones are a gift from God that man is to use in his task of godly dominion. Jewelry is lawful as ornamentation to express honor and glory (e.g., Ex. 41:42; Job 42:11; Esther 8:15) as well as love and beauty (e.g., Song 1:10-11; Isa. 49:18; 61:10; Ezek. 16:8-14, 17; etc.). There are no prohibitions against wearing jewelry in the moral law and there are no historical examples of God’s displeasure with jewelry except when it is associated with or used in idolatry (e.g., Gen. 35:2-4; Ex. 32:2-4) and/or ritual prostitution and fornication (e.g., Hos. 2:12). This reality has forced those who advocate a total prohibition of jewelry to resort to a forced, unnatural reading of such passages and to absurd reasoning.

Excurses on the Appeal to John Calvin against the Use of Jewelry

The papers against all uses of jewelry by Christian women on the internet are very short on exegesis and instead rely almost exclusively on selective quotes from church history, especially John Calvin. For this reason, we will take a moment to analyze one of Calvin’s lengthiest anti-jewelry remarks from his commentary on Genesis 24:22:

His adorning the damsel with precious ornaments is a token of his confidence. For since it is evident by many proofs that he was an honest and careful servant, he would not throw away without discretion the treasures of his master. He knows, therefore, that these gifts will not be ill-bestowed; or, at least, relying on the goodness of God, he gives them, in faith, as an earnest of future marriage. But it may be asked, Whether God approves ornaments of this kind, which pertain not so much to neatness as to pomp? *I answer, that the things related in Scripture are not always proper to be imitated. Whatever the Lord commands in general terms is to be accounted as an inflexible rule of conduct; but to rely on particular examples is not only dangerous, but even foolish and absurd.* Now we know how highly displeasing to God is not only pomp and ambition in adorning the body, but all kind of luxury. In order to free the heart from inward cupidity, he condemns that immoderate and superfluous splendor, which contains within itself many allurements to vice. Where, indeed, is pure sincerity of heart found under splendid ornaments? Certainly all acknowledge this virtue to be rare. *It is not, however, for us expressly to forbid every kind of ornament; yet because whatever exceeds the frugal use of such things is tarnished with some degree of vanity; and more especially, because the cupidity of women is, on this point, insatiable; not only must moderation, but even abstinence, be cultivated as far as possible.* Further, ambition silently creeps in, so that the somewhat excessive adorning of the person soon breaks out into disorder. With respect to the earrings and bracelets of Rebekah, as I do not doubt that they were those in use among the rich, so the uprightness of the age allowed them to be sparingly and frugally used; and *yet I do not excuse the fault.* This example, however, neither helps us, nor alleviates our guilt, if, by such means, we excite and

continually inflame those depraved lusts which, even when all incentives are removed, it is excessively difficult to restrain. The women who desire to shine in gold, seek in Rebekah a pretext for their corruption. Why, therefore, do they not, in like manner, conform to the same austere kind of life and rustic labor to which she applied herself? *But, as I have just said, they are deceived who imagine that the examples of the saints can sanction them in opposition to the common law of God.*⁴¹

While we have the utmost respect for John Calvin and regard him as perhaps the greatest Christian after Augustine, this quote reveals his fallibility and bias on this issue. Note the following reasons: First, Calvin asserts that “the things related in Scripture are not always proper to be imitated.” This is a true statement in that many immoral and devious acts of wicked men and women and even backslidden believers are recorded in the Bible. The question, however, with regard to this passage and others like it (e.g., Gen. 41:42; Job 42:11; Esther 8:15), is whether there is anything within the narrow or broader context to indicate that Abraham’s actions were immoral. The answer is certainly not. In addition, Calvin would have to explain why God repeatedly uses the imagery of the gift of jewelry to a bride to describe His covenant love and relationship to His church. While one could accept the *remote* possibility that Abraham, his servant, Rebekah, Joseph, Job and Mordecai were all ignorant and mistaken in their use of jewelry, one cannot accept the idea that God would use an immoral, unlawful practice as a metaphor for His love of the church. Such an idea reveals the utter bankruptcy and absurdity of the absolute prohibitionist position.

Second, Calvin appeals to a sound principle of interpretation: “Whatever the Lord commands in general terms [i.e. a divine imperative; e.g., “Thou shalt not...”] is to be accounted as an inflexible rule of conduct; but to rely on particular examples [that contradict the divine commandment] is not only dangerous, but even foolish and absurd.” While this is a good and true statement, there is no evidence that it applies to Genesis 24:22. This point can be inferred from the following considerations. (1) The historical examples regarding jewelry discussed above are not given in neutral contexts as an objective historian might record the actions in a battle. Instead, in passage after passage the giving or receiving or wearing of jewelry is presented in a positive light by the inspired author. It is for this reason that attempts to circumvent or dismiss them are “foolish and absurd.” (2) The only passages that Calvin could appeal to as possible “commands in general terms” would be 1 Timothy 2:9 and 1 Peter 3:3. The better articles in favor of an absolute prohibition follow the same approach. They point out the hermeneutical principle that clear passages must be used to interpret the less clear. (With this we heartily agree.) Then, they assert that 1 Timothy 2:9 and 1 Peter 3:3 are “the most clear and explicit passages” on this topic. Consequently, they argue that all other passages in Scripture must be interpreted in light of and harmonized with these “explicit prohibitions.” From a logical standpoint this argument sounds pretty good. But, it suffers from a number of insurmountable problems and must be rejected. For one, it assumes that the historical examples are “less clear.” When God Himself speaks favorably about jewelry as an ornament for His bride, who is clothed with the perfect righteousness of Christ, how can we consider this unclear? It is only unclear to those who *assume* it cannot mean what it so plainly implies.

Moreover, contrary to what the absolute prohibitionist may say, 1 Peter 3:3 and 1 Timothy 2:9 do not support their position. A careful study of these passages proves that Peter

⁴¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 2:20-21, emphasis added.

and Paul are condemning excess, while advocating what ought to be most important to every Christian woman or wife. This can be demonstrated from the following exegetical considerations. First, the examples cited by the apostles are examples of *excess* or *ostentatious* display. Paul says, “not with braided hair or gold or pearls”; while Peter writes, “arranging the hair, wearing gold.” To what does this refer? Is Paul arguing that braided hair is sinful? Are pigtailed of the devil? Is Peter telling women that any hair styling merits church discipline? No, not at all! They are referring to a specific Greco-Roman practice of their own day that was exceptionally expensive, showy, ostentatious and even gaudy. Women would have their hair braided with gold and pearls and even jewels intertwined in the braids. “The wealthy women braided their hair by using it to hold costly emeralds, pearls, and gold ornaments. It was a display of wealth. It was done to impress.”⁴² As J. N. D. Kelly notes, “The elaboration in hair-styles, make-up, dress and personal jewelry in the 1st and 2nd cents. is eloquently attested by the literature and art of the period.... Later writers (e.g., Clement Alex., *Paed.* iii.11.66; Tertullian, *De orat.* xx.; *De cultu fem.* i.6; 7-13; Cyprian, *De hab. Virg.* viii) take these texts literally as wholesale ban on feminine finery, but the real object of the apostolic authors was a constructive one, to inculcate a proper sense of values.”⁴³

“It is the excess and sensuality that the items connote that Paul forbids (cf. Jas. 5:1-6), not braids, gold, pearls, or even costly garments in and of themselves. This is borne out by the fact that the Christian community of the NT is quite willing to use these terms with positive connotations (gold: Mt. 2:11; 1 Cor. 3:12; Rev. 3:18; 21:18ff.; pearls: Mt. 7:6; 13:45, 46; Rev. 21:21; a bride adorned [keko-smemenen]: Rev. 21:2), as is the OT (e.g., the Song of Solomon).”⁴⁴ William Hendriksen concurs, “The very combination of the word ‘braids’ with ‘and gold or pearls or expensive clothing’ should have sufficed to inform the reader that the apostle is thinking of the sin of extravagance in outward adornment. As to these ‘braids’ the sense is not that under any and all circumstances women throughout all future generations are here forbidden to wear their hair braided. Not at all.”⁴⁵ Gordon Clark’s analysis of 1 Peter 3:3 is also helpful:

⁴² Gordon H. Clark, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1983), 43.

⁴³ J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1969), 129. William Hendriksen comments on the styles of that day are informative. He writes, “But what about these *braids* which were popular in the world of Paul’s day? No expense was spared to make them dazzling. They actually sparkled. The braids were fastened by jeweled tortoise-shell combs, or by pins of ivory or silver. Or the pins were of bronze with jeweled heads, the more varied and expensive the better. The pin-heads often consisted of miniature images (an animal, a human hand, an idol, the female figure, etc.). *Braids*, in those days, often represented *fortunes*. They were articles of luxury! The Christian woman is warned not to indulge in such extravagance.

Similarly, a woman who is a believer must not try to make herself conspicuous by a vain display of ornaments of *gold*. Also, she will not yearn for *pearls*, obtained (at that time) from the Persian Gulf or from the Indian Ocean. These were often fabulously priced and thus way beyond the purchasing power of the average church-member. In order to obtain a pearl of great value a merchant might have to sell all his possessions (Matt. 13:46). Yet someone who was living in Paul’s day said, “I have seen Lollia Paulina [wife of emperor Caligula] covered with emeralds and pearls gleaming all over her head, hair, ears, neck, and fingers, to the value of over a million dollars” (*Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus* [Grand Rapids; Baker, (1955, 57) 1979], 107).

⁴⁴ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 136.

⁴⁵ William Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus*, 107. The idea that the absolute prohibitionist position is the position of the Puritans and early Presbyterians is not true. The Presbyterian minister Alexander Nisbet (c. 1623-1669) whose commentary was first published in 1658 writes, “Although the Lord allows persons who are in eminency above others to have ornaments beyond necessity, Isa. 22:20, 21, 22, and others to have more than ordinary at some special occasions, Gen. 24:30, and all of his people to provide for things honest in the sight of all men, Rom. 12:17, yet when any professor of religion becomes excessive in the use of his liberty in these things, he

If the verse were an absolute prohibition against plaiting the hair and wearing a piece of gold, it would also be an absolute prohibition of wearing clothes. The three items, hair, jewelry, and clothes are all equal parts of the same grammatical construction. What is said of any one is equally said of the other two.... Some women are attractive only in the sense that they attract attention. Their adornment is external. The Christian woman depends on an inward spiritual attractiveness. Let her plait her hair, let her wear gold jewelry...and of course let her wear clothes [all modestly or in moderation of course]; but let her not depend on these for her personality [or attractiveness].... The adornment of the Christian woman is to come from the hidden personality of the heart—an adornment that never goes out of style and that becomes more and more attractive as the years pass by.⁴⁶

This is the essence of Peter and Paul's thought.

Second, the examples set forth ("in former times, the holy women who trusted in God"), in particular Sarah, essentially renders the absolute prohibitionist view impossible. Sarah was the wife of Abraham who owned jewelry and gave it as a pledge or wedding gift to Rebekah. Consequently, the point of the passage is not to ban all jewelry, but to emphasize godliness or spiritual beauty over outward adornments. The hidden, incorruptible beauty is far more important than outward adornments which are passing away. Even the most beautiful woman in the whole

will be so far from commending religion to others thereby that his practice will rather be a hindrance to others to fall in love with it, who may or will readily take occasion thence to think that Christians have no better things to take them up than these whereupon they waste their time, pain and means; for, from this evil the Apostle here dissuades Christian women as they would gain their heathen husbands; importing that their vanity and excess in the matter of their apparel would rather hinder them than gain them to fall in love with Christianity" (*1&2 Peter* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1658) 1982], 119-120). The 17th century Presbyterian Matthew Poole also rejected the absolute prohibitionist position. He writes, "...ornaments of gold, or pearls, or costly array. The Apostle commandeth not these ornaments where they are suited to the quality of women, and ask not too much time to put on, and in order; but *where they are too excessive* with respect to the purse of those who wear them, or take up more time to be spent in putting them on than is fit to be spent, especially on the Sabbath day, or where they are put on out of pride, or to make a vain show..." (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 3:778; emphasis added). He adds in his commentary on 1 Peter 3:3, "The apostle doth not absolutely condemn all kind of ornaments, or rich attire, which we find used sometimes by the godly themselves in the Scripture, Gen. xxiv.22, 30; Esth. v.1 compared with Psal. xlv.9, 13, where the spiritual ornaments of Christ's spouse are set forth by terms taken from the external ornaments of Solomon's wife; and Ezek. xvi.12, these things are spoken of as God's gifts. But he taxeth all vanity, levity, immoderate sumptuousness or luxury in apparel, and bodily ornaments in women (or men) whatsoever is above their place or condition in the world, or above their estate and ability..." (Ibid, 3:908). See also John Gill, *Exposition of the New Testament*, 3:285, 555. Even Martin Luther (who, like Calvin, was strongly influenced by the negative view of jewelry among the church fathers) did not adopt an absolute prohibitionist position. He writes, "This treasure, which is within us, should be possessed not only by the wife, but also by the husband. Possibly one may ask whether that which Peter here says of ornaments is commanded or not. We read of Esther, Esther 2:12, that she wore a golden crown and precious ornaments, decking herself as a queen. So also of Judith, Judith 10:3f. But in the context it is recorded, that she despised the ornament and wore it from necessity, Esther 14:16, Vulgate on Esther 3:11. Hence we say a wife should be so disposed as not to care for this adorning; yet, inasmuch as people convinced on the subject of ornaments, cease not to use them, because of their habit and nature; therefore a Christian wife should despise them. *But if the husband require them, or there is a reasonable cause for her to adorn herself, it may be done.* But she should be adorned, as Peter here says, be inwardly attired in a meek and quiet spirit. You are beautifully enough adorned when you are adorned for your husband" (*Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, (1902) 1982], 136; emphasis added). The neoplatonism and asceticism of the church fathers shines through in this quote. While Luther cannot deny that the Scriptures allow women to wear jewelry under certain circumstances, they "should despise them."

⁴⁶ Gordon H. Clark, *New Heavens, New Earth: A Commentary on First and Second Peter* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1967, 72), 112, 113.

world must grow old and die. As the wife of rich Abraham, Sarah probably owned jewelry like Rebekah, but her priority in life was not on external, perishable things but rather on serving her husband through godly submission. Moreover, if jewelry was lawful in the Old Covenant era, but was now made unlawful for New Covenant believers, why would Peter appeal to an Old Covenant example of a family that owned jewelry and gave it to a godly woman as a gift? It ought to be obvious to anyone (not governed by presupposition or wedded to human traditions), that the dispensational attempt to circumvent the Old Testament passages that speak positively of the use of jewelry for God's people is untenable.

The third argument in Calvin's quote is essentially pragmatic and legalistic. After Calvin essentially admits that we cannot impose a full prohibition ("It is not, however, for us expressly to forbid every kind of ornament." If wearing jewelry is a sin then we should and must "expressly...forbid every kind of ornament."), he argues that "because whatever exceeds the frugal use of such things [This also appears to be an admission that a "frugal" or moderate use of jewelry is lawful] is tarnished with some degree of vanity; and more especially because the cupidity [i.e. carnal desire] of women is, on this point, insatiable; not only must moderation, but even abstinence, be cultivated as far as possible." If Calvin believed that Peter and Paul taught an absolute prohibition, moderation would not even be an option. Believers cannot argue for a moderate practice of something sinful. His argument in favor of complete abstinence assumes essentially that with regard to this issue, abstinence is the best way to proceed. This assertion is fallacious. Sarah, Rebekah and Esther did not exhibit an insatiable desire for jewelry and adornments.⁴⁷

Those who claim that Calvin was a strict prohibitionist go too far anyway, for he denies that Paul and Peter forbid all ornamentation in his commentaries on these passages. Concerning 1 Timothy 2:9 he writes,

He intended to embrace the opportunity of correcting a vice to which women are almost always prone, and which perhaps at Ephesus, being a city of vast wealth and extensive merchandise, especially abounded. That vice is — *excessive eagerness and desire to be richly dressed*. He wishes therefore that their dress should be regulated by modesty and sobriety; for *luxury* and *immoderate expense* arise from a desire to make a display either for the sake of pride or of departure from chastity. And *hence we ought to derive the rule of moderation*; for, since dress is an indifferent matter, (as all outward matters are,) *it is difficult to assign a fixed limit*,

⁴⁷ In the Westminster Standards "rich apparel" and "ornaments" (i.e. jewelry) are items listed as "lawful," that are to be abstained from during public solemn fasting. In the *Directory for the Publick Worship of God* we read, "When some great and notable judgments are either inflicted upon a people, or apparently imminent, or by some extraordinary provocations notoriously deserved; as also when some special blessing is to be sought and obtained, publick solemn fasting (which is to continue the whole day) is a duty that God expecteth from that nation or people. A religious fast requires total abstinence, not only from all food, (unless bodily weakness do manifestly disable from holding out till the fast be ended, in which case somewhat may be taken, yet very sparingly, to support nature, when ready to faint,) *but also from all worldly labour, discourses, and thoughts, and from all bodily delights, and such like, (although at other times lawful) rich apparel, ornaments, and such like, during the fast*; and much more from whatever is in the nature or use scandalous and offensive, as gaudish attire, lascivious habits and gestures, and other vanities of either sex; which we; recommend to all ministers, in their places, diligently and zealously to reprove, as at other times, so especially at a fast, without respect of persons, as there shall be occasion" ("Concerning Publick Solemn Fasting," emphasis added). Note that the directory makes a distinction between *lawful things* that are to be avoided during fasting and things which are always wrong, "scandalous or offensive." The Westminster Standards make a clear distinction between "rich apparel," "ornaments" and "gaudish attire, lascivious habits" and "other vanities," etc. What this means is that denominations which forbid rich apparel and ornaments (i.e. jewelry) on *all occasions* and not only during fasting are violating the Westminster Standards.

how far we ought to go.... It would be great baseness to deny the appropriateness of modesty as the peculiar and constant ornament of virtuous and chaste women, or the duty of all to observe moderation. Whatever is opposed to these virtues it will be in vain to excuse. He expressly censures certain kinds of superfluity, such as curled hair, jewels, and golden rings; *not that the use of gold or of jewels is expressly forbidden, but that, wherever they are prominently displayed, these things commonly draw along with them the other evils which I have mentioned, and arise from ambition or from want of chastity as their source.*⁴⁸

Note that, following Paul, Calvin speaks of “excessive eagerness,” “luxury,” “immoderate expense,” “the rule of moderation.” He then goes on to say that gold and jewels are only forbidden when “prominently displayed.” The absolute prohibitionist argues that Calvin is merely saying that such items can *only* be used for things like “currency” or “table instruments.” That view is a remote possibility if one assumes that Calvin in mid-sentence switches to a different unrelated topic (currency, tableware, etc.). Moreover, such a view renders the words “excessive,” “moderation,” “immoderate expense,” “certain kinds of superfluity,” “difficult...fixed limit,” “prominently displayed” as superfluous. Total abstinence and moderation are two completely different things.

In any case, where Calvin’s teaching in 1Timothy 2:9 may be ambiguous, his comments on 1 Peter 3:3 are not. He writes,

The other part of the exhortation is, that wives are to adorn themselves *sparingly and modestly*: for we know that they are in this respect much more curious and ambitious than they ought to be. Then Peter does not without cause seek to correct in them this vanity. And though he reproves *generally sumptuous or costly adorning*, yet he points out some things in particular, — that they were not artificially to curl or wreath their hair, as it was usually done by crimping-pins, or otherwise to form it according to the fashion; nor were they to set gold around their head: for these are the things in which excesses especially appear.

It may be now asked, whether the Apostle wholly condemns the use of gold in adorning the body. Were any one to urge these words, it may be said, that he prohibits precious garments no less than gold; for he immediately adds, *the putting on of apparel*, or, of clothes. But it would be an immoderate strictness wholly to forbid neatness and elegance in clothing. If the material is said to be too sumptuous, the Lord has created it; and we know that skill in art has proceeded from him. *Then Peter did not intend to condemn every sort of ornament, but the evil of vanity, to which women are subject.* Two things are to be regarded in clothing, usefulness and decency; and what decency requires is moderation and modesty. Were, then, a woman to go forth with her hair wantonly curled and decked, and make an extravagant display, her vanity could not be excused. They who object and say, that to clothe one’s-self in this or that manner is an indifferent thing, in which all are free to do as they please, may be easily confuted; for *excessive elegance and superfluous display*, in short, *all excesses*, arise from a corrupted mind. Besides, ambition, pride, affectation of display, and all things of this kind, are not indifferent things. Therefore they whose minds are purified from all vanity, will duly order all things, so as not to exceed moderation.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 65-66; emphasis added.

⁴⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 96-97; emphasis added. Calvin’s commentary on the epistles of Peter was dedicated in January 1551 while 1Timothy was dedicated in July 1556. Therefore, when Calvin condemns the wearing of gold or jewels “prominently displayed” in 1Timothy, it is likely that he had in mind what he condemns in his work on 1 Peter (e.g., gold around the head, etc.) and not every kind of jewelry.

Other New Testament Passages

The evidence from the Old Testament that the saints had a positive view of the modest use of jewelry and thus wore it, gave it as gifts, accepted it as gifts and adorned their brides with it, is so overwhelming that some total prohibitionist advocates argue that wearing jewelry was permitted under the Old Covenant administration, but in the New Covenant era is now unlawful. Such dispensational arguments not only contradict a proper understanding of 1 Timothy 2:9 and 1 Peter 3:3, but other New Testament passages as well.

Luke 15:22

Jesus Himself spoke positively about a modest use of jewelry in the parable of the lost son: “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’” And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Lk. 15:17-24).

The absolute prohibitionist argues against the use of this passage by saying, “that Christ is not necessarily commending to Christians the wearing of rings or festive dancing, simply because they are elements present in this parable. They are not there because they are necessarily commended, but because they are commonly present in human society.... We best take care not to allow such elements in a parable to serve as justification for behavior prohibited elsewhere in Scripture.”⁵⁰ Aside from the fact that jewelry is not prohibited anywhere in the Bible, there are a number of serious problems with this argument.

First, our Lord is *not* making an illustration from society in general, but from the Jewish society of His day. The son goes into a foreign land (“journeyed to a far country,” v. 13), and becomes so destitute he ends up working among swine (an unclean animal) and even desires to eat the pig’s food. This aspect of the parable is designed to show just how low the prodigal son had fallen. The fact that Jewish society is in view, indicates that Jesus did not have a problem placing a nice robe and a ring in the possession of an honorable wealthy Jew.

Second, if godly Jews regarded jewelry as inappropriate or sinful in any way, then the parable would not have conveyed the proper concept of blessing intended and would not have been well received by the Jewish audience. Would a wealthy, godly Jew honor his son by causing him to sin through the wearing of jewelry? Obviously, if Jesus regarded the placing of a ring on the finger as immodest or immoral in any way, then He would have chosen a more appropriate illustration, one that would not have offended His Jewish audience.

Third, the vast majority of commentators view this parable as a striking illustration of the Savior’s love towards sinners. The repentant son illustrates a man turning to God with true faith and repentance. Some even view the robe as representative of the imputed righteousness of

⁵⁰ J. Parnell McCarter, *On Jewelry*, 14.

Christ.⁵¹ All of this raises an important question. Could a parable that is designed to teach us about the amazing grace and mercy of God; who imputes the righteousness of His dear Son to believing sinners, use something immoral or sinful to represent salvation? Clearly, the answer to this question is: no, certainly not! The Jews did not hold an absolute prohibitionist position, but rather viewed the ring in this context as a mark of honor, confidence, distinction and blessing (cf. Gen. 41:42; Esther 8:2; Jas. 2:2). Once again, the total prohibitionist must twist Scripture and abandon common sense in order to hold to his legalistic presuppositions.

James 2:1-4

Another passage that contradicts the absolute prohibitionist position is James 2:1-4:

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

James mentions two different men who came into a Christian assembly or meeting. The word assembly is *synagogue* which to Jews usually refers to a public religious service. Since the purpose of this meeting is not specified, some speculate that James has in mind some kind of official judicial gathering (e.g., see Thomas Manton). The majority of commentators believe that it probably refers to a worship service. The author does not specify whether the two men are professing Christians or simply visitors or proselytes. In either case, it does not matter because James' focus is on how believers should react to men of different social status in the assembly. The contrast is between a wealthy man who is given special attention and a poverty stricken man who is treated in a degrading manner. "In the setting of the church that James depicts, the rich man receives a warm welcome and is ushered to a good seat, perhaps somewhat elevated. The poor man can either stand in the back section of the building or sit cross-legged on the floor. In fact, the text says, 'Sit down by my footstool.'"⁵² Although the passage says nothing positive or negative regarding the wealthy man's jewelry, it clearly implies that professing Christians living during the apostolic era did not believe that a modest use of jewelry (e.g., a gold ring) was sinful. If they did, then why would they show favoritism to someone who was explicitly violating Scripture? Would the United Pentecostal Church or the Free Presbyterian Church be tempted to place a man wearing jewelry on a pedestal? Would people who regarded jewelry as sinful,

⁵¹ This common interpretation is eloquently set forth by R. C. H. Lenski: "'The first' means the finest, the one that ranks first. Thus the sinner 'puts on Christ,' Gal. 3:27. 'He hath clothed me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels,' Isa. 61:10. This is the 'wedding garment,' Matt. 22:11, which signifies the imputation to the sinner of the merits and the righteousness of Christ.

The ring is another mark of sonship. The same truth in another form is presented in Hosea 2:19, 20: 'I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Lord.' Slaves went barefoot, not so a son. In God's pardoning reception of the sinner he gives him shoes to honor him as a son and heir but also in the confidence that henceforth he will walk worthily as a son" (*The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg [1946] 1961), 816.

⁵² Simon J. Kistemaker, *James and I-III John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 74.

glorify or show partiality to a person in sin? If James believed that *all uses* of jewelry were sinful and immodest, would he place a man wearing jewelry in a story designed to teach that we must all accept each other equally on the basis of faith in Christ, not social status? He would not. Total prohibitionists cannot circumvent this obvious fact.

Revelation 21:9-21

The Old Testament prophetic imagery of a loving husband who adorns his bride, as a symbol of God's covenant love toward His church, continues into the New Testament era in Revelation 21:9-21:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass.

In this vision John is shown "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (v. 9). This means that "this great city, the holy Jerusalem" (v. 10) which descends out of heaven is the church of Christ. In 12:1 we had a description of the Old Covenant church as a woman wearing a crown with twelve stars. In this description of the bride-city, the church is crowned with a double twelve: the patriarchs and the apostles. The whole people of God from both administrations; from all of human history are found within its walls. The city is described in terms of gold and jewelry to indicate the perfect consummation of the original Edenic order, the tremendous wealth and glory of the New Jerusalem and the incredible blessings of salvation. It also is designed to teach us the great value that those clothed with the righteousness of Christ have in God's sight.

This description is likely an allusion in part to Isaiah's prophecy of the coming redemption of God's people in terms of a city adorned with jewels: "Oh you afflicted one, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones" (54:11-12). "In context, the LORD Almighty is the husband who

takes back his wife with deep compassion and then lavishes upon her sparkling jewels and precious stones....”⁵³

All of this symbolic imagery raises a few questions. Does God use something (gold, jewels, pearls) as an adornment for His bride that He regards as immoral and sinful? Does Jehovah appeal to something that displeases His holy character in order to portray the bride-city as something far more beautiful to the eye than anything that man has ever been able to create? Would it be appropriate to portray the wonders of God’s grace with something explicitly forbidden to God’s own people? Does it make sense that the city which will not have anything in “it that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie” (Rev. 21:27) is itself adorned with something that defiles? These are questions that the absolute prohibitionist cannot adequately answer.

Obviously, this passage, which mirrors the Old Testament prophetic passages that speak of God’s great love for His bride—the true church, implies a lawful, proper use of jewelry. As David Chilton points out, “We may note here that the value which men have always placed on gold and precious stones derives from the prior value which God has imputed to it. God has built into us a desire for gems, but His Word makes it clear that wealth is to be gained as a by-product of the kingdom of God, and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). The Harlot was adorned with jewels, and she perished with them; the Bride is adorned with jewels because of her union with the Bridegroom. It is God who gives the power to get wealth, for His glory (Deut. 8:18); when we turn our God-given wealth into an idol, he takes it away from us and stores it up for the righteous, who use it for God’s Kingdom and are generous to the poor (Job 27:16-17; Prov. 13:22; 28:8; Eccl. 2:26).”⁵⁴ We cannot avoid the conclusion that a modest, non-ostentatious use of jewelry is lawful according to the Word of God.

Excursus on Common Proof Texts Used Against Jewelry

In order to fairly represent the anti-jewelry position we will briefly consider other common proof texts against the use of jewelry. An objective look at these passages will demonstrate that the absolute prohibitionist advocates are misusing Scripture and grasping after straw.

Genesis 35:1-4

Then God said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.” And Jacob said to his household and to all who *were* with him, “Put away the foreign gods that *are* among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.” So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which *were* in their hands, and the earrings which *were* in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which *was* by Shechem.

Chapter 35 begins with God ordering Jacob to go up to Bethel. This command is rooted in Jacob’s previous vow (28:20-22); Jehovah now reminds him to fulfill it (note, the covenant

⁵³ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 570.

⁵⁴ David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 559-560.

promises to Abraham are reiterated in 35:9-13). Before he goes, however, he orders his family (including servants) to sanctify themselves in preparation for the solemn worship that will occur when they arrive at their destination. They are ordered to put away the foreign gods, purify or wash themselves and change their clothes. In verse 4 we are informed that the household handed over their gods and earrings; and these are disposed of by hiding them under a terebinth tree. This is considered proof that earrings have no place on the ears of God's people.

This passage raises a good question. Did Jacob dispose of the earrings because God regarded jewelry as inappropriate and worldly or because these earrings were associated in some way with pagan idolatry? Given the context, it is obvious that the earrings were buried because of their connection to heathen superstitions. Note that there is no command, "to put away your jewelry, especially earrings." The earrings were connected in some manner to the foreign gods. Therefore, to be faithful to the order to put away false gods, they also put away the trinkets or signs of superstition.

This is the interpretation of every reputable commentator. For example Calvin writes, "The earrings were doubtless badges of superstition; as at this day innumerable trifles are seen in the Papacy, by which impiety displays itself."⁵⁵ Matthew Poole concurs, "Either because they had been abused to idolatry and superstition at Shechem, or elsewhere, and therefore were to be destroyed according to God's command...the Scripture seems to insinuate, and other writers expressly affirm, that divers heathen people did wear earrings for the honor of their idols, and with the representations or ensigns of their idols engraven upon them. See Judg. Viii.24."⁵⁶ Matthew Henry notes, Jacob's "family surrendered all they had that was idolatrous or superstitious."⁵⁷ Paul E. Kretzman says, "Jacob's command was so strict that his wives and his servants readily gave up not only the images, the strange gods which they had retained until now, but also their earrings, which were used as amulets and for other superstitious purposes."⁵⁸ Robert Jamieson points out that the earrings handed over "are universally worn in the East, and then as now [are] connected with incantation and idolatry. Some of these earrings, which are used as talismans or amulets, have figures and mystic characters engraven upon them (cf. Hos. 11.13)."⁵⁹ John Gill makes an excellent observation when he writes, "Not the earrings that women wore in common, such as Abraham's servant gave to Rebekah, and which Jacob's wives might wear, for such were not unlawful, but either which were worn in the ears of the strange gods or idols; for such used, it seems, according to some writers, to be decorated and ornamented after that manner; or rather in the ears of the idolaters themselves, worn by them in a superstitious way, having the images of these idols on them."⁶⁰ H. C. Leupold notes that "earrings...must have served as amulets and tokens of some idolatrous practices."⁶¹ C. F. Keil concurs when he says, "The earrings were worn as amulets and charms."⁶² Derek Kidner connects the destruction of the earrings with "the renunciation of magic (the earrings were evidently charms; cf. perhaps Ho. 2:13)."⁶³ Gerhard von Rad agrees when he notes that the

⁵⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 2:237.

⁵⁶ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 1:80.

⁵⁷ Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1:205.

⁵⁸ Paul E. Kretzman, *Popular Commentary on the Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1923), 1:80.

⁵⁹ Robert Jamieson, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 1:60.

⁶⁰ John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, 1:229.

⁶¹ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 916.

⁶² C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 1:316.

⁶³ Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1967), 174-175.

pilgrimage from Shechem to Bethel must begin with “the renunciation of everything which belonged to all the cult of strange gods...Earrings were probably credited with a magical deterrent power.”⁶⁴ G. Ch. Aalders writes, “All of the idols, presumably also the teraphim stolen by Rachel, and the earrings that probably served as amulets, were turned over to Jacob.”⁶⁵ Gordon Wenham suggests that “burying the earrings along with the foreign gods expressed their complete determination to dispose of their idols and also any material that could be used to replace them.”⁶⁶ He also speculates that “the false gods, jewelry and even clothing was tainted because it was part of the booty taken from the Shechemites.”⁶⁷ Victor P. Hamilton agrees with the standard interpretation: “It is unlikely that the reference here is to normal jewelry, but rather to ornaments that carried some kind of religious significance, possibly with iconic impressions on them. Note that Targ. Onqelos renders *nezamin* (‘rings’) by ‘*qdsy*,’ ‘holy objects.’”⁶⁸

With this teaching in mind, one could argue that Genesis 35:4 forbids jewelry that is associated with paganism (e.g., a Hare Krishna earring, a Masonic pendant or tie tack, a Roman Catholic rosary or Virgin Mary necklace, etc.). Also, if someone has a strong temptation to melt down their jewelry to make an idol, they should not own it. To argue that Jacob was opposed to all earrings, when his own godly mother wore them, is to interpret Scripture with blinders on. It is a mockery of biblical interpretation.

Exodus 33:3-6

Perhaps the second most quoted passage by those seeking proof texts against jewelry is Exodus 33:3-6:

“*Go up* to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you *are* a stiff-necked people.” And when the people heard this bad news, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the children of Israel, ‘You *are* a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you. Now therefore, take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you.’” So the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by Mount Horeb.

Do these verses support the total abstinence position? No, not in any way! The people are told that God’s special presence in their midst will not be accompanying them into the promised land because they are an obstinate, “stiff-necked people.” They respond with a deep, profound mourning. Mourning and/or abject grief is properly accompanied by the refusal to wear festive clothing or any ornaments. In fact, a tradition will develop in Israel of mourning in sackcloth and ashes as a sign of humility and a penitent spirit. There is not one reputable Old Testament scholar who believes that this passage forbids the use of festive clothing or jewelry *in all circumstances*. In fact, every commentator that this author consulted believes the removal of ornaments was directly connected to their grief.⁶⁹ As Durham remarks, “As an expression of their grief, the

⁶⁴ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1961), 331.

⁶⁵ G. Ch. Alders, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 162-163.

⁶⁶ Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1994), 324.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 375; footnote 15.

⁶⁹ “This [removal of ‘their precious garments or jewels’] was a visible sign and profession of their inward humiliation and repentance for their sin, and of their deep sense of God’s displeasure” (Matthew Poole, 1:190). “In

people do not wear any ‘ornamentation’ or ‘festive dress’.... The present text is concerned only with depicting Israel’s profound mourning of the threatened loss of Yahweh’s Presence and to express that grief has utilized a tradition, no doubt quite ancient, of mourning dress.”⁷⁰ One should heed Brevard S. Childs who warns us of reading too much into the text: “In the end, whatever garments or ornaments were meant, the only clear point of the text is that their removal indicates a sign of mourning on the part of the people. Further than this one cannot go with any degree of certainty.”⁷¹ This passage actually indicates that jewelry was lawful, for the people were wearing jewelry without any rebukes from God or Moses.

Isaiah 3:17-23

A passage that total prohibitionists appeal to as teaching that God strongly disapproves of jewelry is Isaiah 3:17-23:

Therefore the LORD will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, the chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels, the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, the glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils.

In this prophecy of judgment the women of Jerusalem are presented as supremely arrogant (“outstretched necks,” v. 16), immoral (“wanton eyes,” v. 16) and worldly. The prophet enumerates their ornaments almost to the point of absurdity to reveal that their hearts were bound up with worldly glory, possessions, self-exaltation and luxury instead of trusting in God and living for Him. Because they forgot God, served idols and lived for their own pleasures and exaltation, Jehovah will bring them to a state of supreme humiliation. The very women who took

token of great shame and humiliation, those that were undressed did *not put on their ornaments* (v. 4), and those that were dressed *stripped themselves of their ornaments*, by the mount...When the Lord *God calls to weeping and mourning* we must comply with the call, and not only fast from pleasant bread (Dan. x:3), but lay aside our ornaments; even those that are decent enough at other times are unseasonably worn on days of humiliation or in times of public calamity, Isa. iii.18” (Matthew Henry, 1:419). “[A]nd no man did put on his ornaments; they used to wear at other times, their rings and jewels, which the princes and the chief among the people especially were wont to wear; and in common the people did not put on their best clothes, or what they usually wore, but clothed themselves in mournful habits, in sackcloth and ashes, or in some such-like manner” (John Gill, 1:517). “In seasons of mourning it is customary with Eastern people to lay aside all gewgaws, and divest themselves of their jewels, their gold, and everything rich and splendid in their dress.... Though it seems to have been unknown to the early Israelites, it was an established usage in the times of the monarchy for the people, divesting themselves of any gay or elegant clothing in deep humiliation, to assume sackcloth (cf. 1 Sam. xix.24; Isa. xxxii.11; Mic. i.8, 8c); and it is still common amongst Oriental mourners still to appear in dark-coloured clothes, or at least to lay aside whatever seems ornamental” (Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fauset and David Brown, 1:412). “[T]hey showed their deep sorrow by putting on the garments of mourning; and no man did put on his ornaments.... The Lord demanded this evidence of sincere repentance...” (Paul E. Kretzman, 1:173). “The people were so overwhelmed with sorrow by this evil word, that they put off their ornaments, and showed by this outward sign the trouble of their heart” (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, 1:233). “[T]he people mourned when they heard the distressing words (Ezek. 24:17; 26:16). They humbled themselves before the Lord.... They expressed their sorrow by not putting on any ornaments” (W. H. Gispen, *Exodus* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 304.

⁷⁰ John I. Durham, *Exodus* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 437.

⁷¹ Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Louisville, KY: The Westminster Press, 1974), 589.

pride in their appearance and identified themselves with the outstretched neck, the fluttering of the eyes and their dainty walk (v. 16; produced by the wearing of so many gold ankle chains), will find themselves stripped naked and their heads shaved (a universal sign of female humiliation and disgrace). These wicked women will not only be stripped of their prized possessions but also of their men (3:25-26; 4:1).

This shocking picture raises a few questions. Does this section of Scripture condemn all uses of jewelry? Is the absolute prohibition of jewelry a legitimate application of these verses? No. Such a view must be rejected for the following reasons. First, this portion of Scripture is focused on pride and the sinful abuse of possessions, not on jewelry or clothing in general. As Matthew Henry notes, “The prophet did not speak of these things as in themselves sinful (they might lawfully be had and used), but as things which they were proud of and should therefore be deprived of.”⁷² Edward J. Young concurs:

Isaiah has already condemned the “proud, arrogant deeds” of the people and their haughty demeanor. But now he directs his attention to the women. When the women are wholly vain and self-centered, the cancer of moral decay is truly consuming the nation’s heart. Proper adornment and true beauty in women should be a reflection of the glory of God. When women cultivate and cherish beauty only for itself, they are infringing upon and detracting from the glory and beauty that belong to Him. That ordinary women of the world should be vainglorious might be expected. But the daughters of Zion, women who live in the city of God, under the very shadow of the Temple, who should have set the example of the beauty of holiness, these are haughty and walk with outstretched neck.

Is Isaiah, however, one who can see no place in life for the beauty of adornment? *Does he condemn beauty and ornament as such? That is not the case. It is not the various articles of jewelry in themselves which are reached by his condemnation.* Something more serious has gripped his attention and drawn down upon itself his condemnation. In Jerusalem there was an inner pride and corruption of the heart which manifested itself outwardly. That it was which attracted the prophet’s censure. “Wherever,” says Calvin, “dress and splendor are carried to excess, there is evidence of ambition, and many vices are usually connected with it; for whence comes luxury in men and women but from pride?” And again he remarks, “First then, he justly declares pride to be the source of the evil, and points it out by the sign, that is, by their gait.”⁷³

Second, in the prophet’s enumeration there are a number of items that are identified as *lawful* in other portions of Scripture (e.g., earrings, rings, apparel, fine linen). Consequently, one cannot pick and choose certain things listed and forbid them without being arbitrary and inconsistent. (Unless, of course, such items are condemned elsewhere in the Bible or the context reveals they are associated with idolatry or superstition.) While we commend a desire to be modest and reject the widespread declension and worldliness found in many churches today, we can never condone or participate in legalism or human traditions because to do so is also sinful and worldly.

Chapter 5: What about Makeup?

When discussing believers and modesty another topic that divides professing Christians is makeup. Those denominations and writers who prohibit all uses of makeup for women argue

⁷² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 4:25.

⁷³ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 1:161; emphasis added.

that every example of makeup being used in the Bible is associated with *wicked* women. This is an argument of guilt by association. Since only wicked women are identified as those who wore makeup, God must be telling us that the use of makeup is wicked as well. Before we discuss whether such a conclusion is a sound logical inference from God's Word or a legitimate application of Scripture, we need to point out a few things.

First, there are no explicit prohibitions against wearing makeup in the Bible. It is for this reason that those desiring to ban all makeup must rely on such tenuous inferences in their argumentation. Therefore, those who disapprove of any use of makeup must be careful not to judge others on this issue. God could have simply banned makeup as He did the pagan practice of cutting or tattooing the body (e.g., "You shall not make any cuttings in your body for the dead nor tattoo any mark on you: I am the LORD" [Lev. 19:28]). The issue of makeup, however, is more difficult than jewelry because unlike jewelry, which has many passages that prove it was lawful (e.g., Gen. 24:47; 41:42; Ex. 32:2; 35:22; Dt. 15:16-17; Isa. 61:10; Ezek. 16:8-14, 17; Job 42:11; Est. 8:15; Lk. 15:22; Jas. 2:1-4; Rev. 21:9-21), the Bible has nothing *directly* to say on makeup, whether positive or negative.

Second, an examination of the three passages which mention eye makeup reveals that these sections of Scripture are not designed as a moral commentary on makeup itself, but rather reveal unbiblical responses of people under divine judgment.

2 Kings 9:30-31

Our first passage regards the behavior of the evil queen Jezebel. 2 Kings 9:30-31 reads, "Now when Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window. Then, as Jehu entered the gate, she said, 'Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?'" In this passage Jehu comes to Jezreel to put Jezebel to death. She is aware of this and prepares herself by painting (Hebrew-*puk*, Greek-*stimmi*, Latin-*stibium*) her eyes. If we translate the verb *painted* literally it would say "she set her eyes in stibium"; to paraphrase "she applied eyeliner." The verb is usually identified with the noun *kohl* (Assyrian-*quhlu*), a mineral pulverized by the Arabs into a black powder, which was mixed with oil and applied to the eyebrows, and/or as an eyeliner, and/or eyelash enhancer. It was used throughout the ancient world by women and can be seen on Egyptian hieroglyphics and pottery. Clay jars of this substance have been found in the tombs of women from ancient Egypt. Until the widespread use of modern cosmetics the same substance was used by Moorish women of north Africa and women in India. The prepared ointment was "applied with a fine smooth eye-pencil of the thickness of an ordinary goose-quill, made of either wood, metal or ivory. The way to use it was to hold the central portion of the pencil horizontally between the eyelids, and then draw it out between them, twisting it all the while, so that the edges of the eyelids were blackened all round; and the object was to heighten the splendor of the dark southern eye..."⁷⁴ She also adorned her head, "by putting on the head-band and crown which held her elaborate head-dress in place."⁷⁵

Those who oppose any use of makeup in general argue that Jezebel was putting on makeup in order to attempt to seduce or incite lust in Jehu. Such a view is incorrect and has been rejected by virtually every reputable commentator (e.g., Matthew Poole, Matthew Henry, John Gill, Paul E. Kretzmann, James A. Montgomery, C. F. Keil, Fredrick W. Farrar, G. H. Jones,

⁷⁴ C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 3:344.

⁷⁵ Paul. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1923), 1:620.

etc.). The general consensus of Old Testament scholars is that Jezebel wanted to present herself in a royal, dignified manner and die as a queen. This makes sense in light of her age (at the time of her death she was an old hag and would not have tempted Jehu) as well as her blatantly sarcastic remarks to Jehu (she addresses him as Zimri the murderer of the king [Zimri ascended to the throne after killing Elah and all those who remained of the house of Baasha. He was then himself murdered after reigning for a few days; cf. 1 Kg. 16:9-15. This seems to be an implied threat: “You will kill me and my husband, but your day of slaughter will come also.” In other words, “You can expect to be slain by some of my posterity.”] Jezebel also mocks Jehu by beginning her implied threat with the absurd remark: “Is it peace?”).

The point of the inspired author in this passage is not for us to draw out some negative ethical concept of mascara; but, rather, to point out Jezebel’s pride and arrogance. She was not repentant at all and cared more for her status as the queen than admitting her guilt and repenting in sackcloth and ashes. Instead of humbling herself and admitting her sin, she made herself look great and majestic because she wanted to face death like a proud humanist. *In this context* it was certainly inappropriate for Jezebel to put on makeup and place the queenly ornament on her head. This truth, however, does not prove or even imply that mascara is inappropriate in other circumstances (e.g., at a wedding). Perhaps those who presuppose that it does present a solid case against makeup in all circumstances should also forbid “adorning the head,” wearing hats and looking out of windows, for verse 30 connects painting her eyes with all these actions.

Jeremiah 4:30

Another passage which is used as a proof text against makeup comes in Jeremiah’s prophecy against Jerusalem: “And when you are plundered, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain you will make yourself fair: your lovers will despise you; they will seek your life” (4:30). With the metaphor of a loose woman (or even a whore) who seeks to make herself beautiful to attract her former lovers, God rebukes Jerusalem for seeking help from destruction by appealing to the surrounding pagan nations (her adulterous paramours such as Assyria or Egypt; cf. 2:35-36). “She is supposed to do all she can to keep up her interest in their affections. She does what she can to make herself appear considerable among the nations and a valuable ally. She compliments them by her ambassadors to the highest degree, to engage them to stand by her now in her distress.”⁷⁶

The sin that is being emphasized in this passage is Jerusalem’s folly in putting her trust in heathen allies instead of God. In verse 31 she recognizes that her lovers (v. 30; Hebrew, *hoge bim*) are her murderers (Hebrew, *hore gim*). The leaders and people were in love with the ways of the heathen and did not trust in or love Jehovah. Consequently, they acted pragmatically by looking to their heathen paramours. But they would discover that these lovers were vicious killers. Because she refused to yield her soul, life and fate to Jehovah—her husband and redeemer—she must yield it to murderers, to those who acted as lovers but were really full of hate and thoughts of vengeance. In verse 31 unfaithful Jerusalem is pictured as a woman giving birth, gasping, screaming in agony, and dreading her plight as she realizes she has placed herself in the hands of bloodthirsty murderers. “Wanton Judah, playing the harlot over the years, had reached the climax and had paid the price of her iniquity.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 4:432.

⁷⁷ J. A. Thomas, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 233.

All of this raises some pertinent questions: Was this prophecy designed to tell the inhabitants of Jerusalem the dangers of crimson clothing, jewelry and eye makeup? No. The whole point of the metaphor was to point to Judah's spiritual adultery and her lack of trust in God, exhibited in her trust in wicked heathen allies. The clothing, jewelry and makeup are incidental to the prophetic application. Yes, but does not the metaphor associate mascara with loose women or prostitutes? While it is true that whores sometimes wear scarlet clothing, jewelry and makeup, the point of the metaphor is on the attempt to be attractive or alluring, not on the pros and cons of scarlet clothing, earrings or eyeliner. In Scripture there are exceptionally godly women who wear high quality attractive purple clothing (e.g., Prov. 31:22); clothe their covenant children in scarlet (e.g., Prov. 31:21) and even wear beautiful jewelry (Gen. 24:47; Song of Sol. 1:10-12) without sin or guilt. Consequently, one cannot appeal to Jeremiah 4:30 as a proof text against eyeliner without being inconsistent and arbitrary in one's application.

Ezekiel 23:38-40

The only other passage that mentions makeup has strong similarities with the Jeremiah passage:

Moreover they have done this to Me: They have defiled My sanctuary on the same day and profaned My Sabbaths. For after they had slain their children for their idols, on the same day they came into My sanctuary to profane it; and indeed thus they have done in the midst of My house. "Furthermore you sent for men to come from afar, to whom a messenger *was* sent; and there they came. And you washed yourself for them, painted your eyes, and adorned yourself with ornaments (Ezek. 23:38-40).

To understand these verses we must consider the context. Chapter 23 is an allegory regarding Samaria and Jerusalem. The prophet uses crude, shocking language to describe their idolatry and spiritual adultery as well as their intrigues with foreign powers. In verses 22 to 45 we have four oracles of judgment. Verse 40 which mentions eyeliner comes in the final section which recapitulates and enlarges upon the previous oracles. Both Samaria and Jerusalem have defiled God's sanctuary and profaned God's Sabbaths. They were a thoroughly syncretistic people. After they sacrificed their children to Molech, they would come to the central sanctuary to worship Jehovah. Like Jeremiah 4, the Ezekiel passage refers to their invitations to pagan foreign nations to make alliances. The description of a loose woman or harlot who makes herself up and prepares her chamber is used because these alliances were an aspect of their apostasy or spiritual adultery. To entice these heathen countries they had to be unfaithful to their husband, Jehovah. A common practice in the ancient world would be to build temples with the favored nation's pagan god to honor the alliance and solidify the covenant. (When Solomon married heathen women to make alliances, this involved housing all their foreign gods; cf. 1 Kgs. 11:4-6). These Jews were so corrupt they had no problem worshipping the false gods of their neighbors. "The Jews enter league with these robbers, and admit their idols, and so commit whoredom with them."⁷⁸ The result of all this would be God's judgment. They would suffer the fate of idolaters and hypocrites.

Does verse 40 in its context teach us that Christian women are not allowed to use makeup? No. Like Jeremiah 4:30 it is simply a symbol of an enticement to the foreign powers.

⁷⁸ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 2:734.

As noted in our discussion of Jeremiah, the only way for those who prohibit all use of makeup to use this passage is to make an appeal to guilt by association. Prostitutes put on eyeliner to look more attractive and be more seductive. There are a few problems with such an approach. First, the passage does not condemn eye makeup, jewelry or the use of beds (KJV) or couches (NJKV, v. 41), but only their use in the committing of sin. A man can put jewelry on his wife (Gen. 24:24-47; Song of Sol. 1:10-12) and lay on a “stately couch” with her without guilt. What then would be wrong with a modest use of makeup for a special occasion (e.g., a wedding, anniversary, a special romantic evening out with a spouse, etc.)? Second, arguments based on guilt by association must have something in the context that indicates a universal moral principle or one can prove virtually anything with such an argument. Certain Anabaptist groups, for example, allow beards because Jesus had one, but disallow mustaches because supposedly the Roman soldiers who crucified Christ had them. Such reasoning is absurd. Those who use the passages discussed above simply have not demonstrated through logical inference, sound exegesis and legitimate application that God has forbidden or disapproves of all uses of makeup. One, perhaps, can multiply quotes from prominent churchmen who disapproved of makeup, but such argumentation without biblical proof is pharisaical and Romish.

What then is to be done in situations where the Bible gives no explicit directions on a particular issue? One must apply the general principles of the Word to particular situations. In this case, Paul and Peter’s teaching on modesty which applies to the ostentatious, gaudy, excessive, indecent or showy use of clothing, hairstyles and jewelry could be applied to makeup. A woman should not try to look like a prostitute, Broadway starlet or circus clown. Applying a general principal takes wisdom, caution, discernment and a certain amount of sanctified common sense. Such a view will offend legalists and all those wedded to human traditions, but given the teaching of Scripture on this matter it is the only viable biblical option.

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