

G P S

For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

The Adorning of the Body

Since the fall into sin God has commanded that the body be properly covered in a modest and proper way. I Corinthians 11 teaches us that proper adorning of the body involves more than hats and hair. It is a matter of headship (3-5), a matter of modesty (5-6), and a matter of gender recognition (13-15).

A matter of headship (1 Cor. 11:3-5)

There is both equality and inequality within headship. The Father and the Son are equal in deity yet for purposes of incarnation the Son submits to the Father. The husband and the wife are equal as souls before God but for purposes of marriage the wife submits to her husband. The inequality is shown among lesser heads and greater heads. The man is not equal to the Son but submits because to do so is to submit to God. The wife submits to the husband because to do so is to submit to Jesus Christ her higher Head. Improper adorning (a “symbol,” vs. 10) for anyone under a higher or lower head “dishonors” that head. Jesus was always submissive to the Father but men and women, husbands and wives fail too often.

A matter of modesty (1 Cor. 11:5-6, 14)

Paul says that it is “shameful” for a woman to be shaven like a man (also because she would appear to be a harlot). He also says it is shameful for a man to wear hair like a woman. Modesty in appearance is a symbol of submission to one’s head which is ultimately to God Himself. Uncovering oneself in an immodest way is always a sin. The Holiness Code of Leviticus 18 calls sexual immorality a discovery of someone’s nakedness. Nakedness and immodesty are described as a “shame” in Scripture (Isa. 47:3; Jer. 13:26; Rev. 3:18; 16:15). Immodesty or nakedness (even for parts of the

body) is to misuse one’s gender identification and thereby dishonor one’s head. For the same reason cross-dressing is a sin. Men and women are not to adorn themselves as the opposite sex (Deut. 22:5). In the home, the father and the sons are to look like males, and the mother and daughters are to look like females. This honors the relationships related to headship and submission.

A matter of Gender (1 Cor. 11:13-15)

Keeping gender-specific appearance is pleasing to God. Paul uses gender as an indication of proper headship and submission. There are not specific descriptions about dress for males and females (though Peter comes close in 1 Pet. 3:4), but two things direct us properly. Nature *teaches* gender while culture *shows* gender. Paul says “nature itself teaches” (11:14). In Romans 1, Paul said that sexual perversion is “against nature” (Rom. 1:26). “Nature” (Gr. *phusis*, in Cor. and Rom.) means “the nature of things.” God created only two genders, male and female (Gen. 1:27; Matt. 19:4), and His creation vividly shows distinction between the two. However, culture *shows* gender. That is, different cultures may have different forms of dress, but every culture has its distinctive styles for male and female. You know what these are in your own culture. Cross-dressing is cross-dressing because it’s an obvious contradiction in that culture. Violations of nature or culture dishonor your Head, that is, God your Creator.

How we adorn our bodies says much about our faith. “Such symbols can be easily discerned. We can often determine by a woman’s appearance if she is rebelling against everything womanhood stands for or if a man is effeminate and denying recognized symbols of masculinity.” MacArthur, *Successful Parenting*, 56.

Further reading on Adornment

Andreas & Margaret Köstenberger: “Like the foot washing, woman’s wearing of head coverings is clearly a cultural practice that only communicates the underlying principle it’s seeking to convey—the proper submission to authority—in cultures where women wear head coverings to indicate their submissive stance.” *God’s Design for Man and Woman*, p. 173

Kevin DeYoung: “Nature doesn’t teach us how long our hair should be. Culture teaches us the acceptable hair lengths for men and women. Nature, though, teaches us that men ought to adorn themselves like men and women like women. The natural God-given inclination of men and women is to be ashamed of that which confuses their sexual difference. Culture gives us the symbols of masculinity and femininity, while nature dictates that men should embrace their manhood and women embrace their womanhood.” *Men and Women in the Church*, p. 56

Josh Mulvihill: “Explain to your child that to be modest is to dress respectfully and in an ordered fashion. We are modest when we cover our body with clothes, but, more specifically, we are modest when we wear clothes that we would want others to wear if they were around us. Modesty is a way to love our neighbors.” *Preparing Children for Marriage*, p. 182

Thomas Schreiner: “Paul rightly saw, as he shows in this text, that there is a direct link between women appropriating leadership and the loss of femininity. It is no accident that Paul addresses the issues of feminine adornment and submission to male leadership in the same passage.” “Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 176-77

Elisabeth Elliot: “Nudity [our culture says] is not supposed to move us. We are asked to behold without shock, without even surprise, the nearly total exposure of every conceivable shape and size of physique. But I don’t want to look at nudity without emotion. I want it reserved to enhance, not exhibited to destroy, the depth of individual experience. I feel I am being robbed of the incalculably valuable treasures of delicacy, mystery, and sophistication. Modesty was a system of protection. But the alarms have all been disconnected. The house is wide open to plunder.” *Let Me be a Woman*, p. 158

The Closing of the American Mind, Allan Bloom (1987). Being a Baby Boomer in the 1960s, Bloom’s critique of the university’s decline hit a special note with me and I devoured the book. He wrote of the decline of morality and modesty in the time of a more progressive culture. Here is a section I had marked.

“The criticism of the old is of no value if there is no prospect of the new. It is a way of removing the impediments to vice presented by decaying virtue. In the sixties the professors were just hastening to fold up their tents so as to be off the grounds before the stampede trampled them. The openness was to ‘doing your own thing.’ It was, and I suppose still is, a sure sign of an authoritarian personality to believe that the university should try to have a vision of what an educated person is. ‘Growth’ or ‘individual development’ was all that was to be permitted, which in America meant only that the vulgarities present in society at large would overwhelm the delicate little plants kept in the university greenhouse for those who need other kinds of nourishment.” (p. 321)

The Abolition of Man, C.S. Lewis (1947).

Lewis called modern men of his generation “Men without Chests.” They were cerebral with large minds, and visceral with much desire, but they had no chests, the morality to judge between the two. No wonder we have little morality or modesty almost a century later.

“The head rules the belly through the chest—the seat, as Alanus tells us, of Magnanimity, of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments. The chest—Magnanimity—sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and the visceral man. It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal. The operation of *The Green Book* and its kind is to produce what may be called Men without Chests. It is an outrage that they should be commonly spoken of as Intellectuals.” (p. 34)