About the Author and the Ministry

Terry Arnold holds a Doctorate in Theology (Dth), a Masters degree (MABS) and several diplomas. He was founder and president of *South Pacific Bible Institute*, a Bible college training and equipping people for ministry. In addition he was the founder of Hervey Bay Bible Church in Queensland, Australia. He has for 25 years served as an elder and then pastor.

Terry is the author of several books and is involved in a full time ministry of *teaching*, *informing* and *equipping* the church. He is also editor of a growing worldwide publication '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

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TA Ministries is a non-denominational and non-profit faith ministry founded in 1989 when the book *'To Catholics Whom I Love*' was written by Terry Arnold. This book went through several re-prints and served as a fruitful outreach to Roman Catholics.

In 1996 the ministry became a full-time operation with the introduction of a free newsletter, later named '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

Diakrisis is published bi-monthly to *teach*, *inform* and *equip* the church of Biblical truths and to warn of false teaching. It has also been a valuable reference aid to hundreds of pastors/elders.

Christian Modesty

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by

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Conclusion:

I*n scripture, 'modesty' is closely associated with character.* It involves a voluntary limitation of one's freedom of thought and behaviour. The ***'manner'*** *of dress needs to match what is the holiness within*. The word of God says that we are not to love the world nor the things of the world. (1John 2:15) and we are not to follow after the fashions of this age, (Rom.12:2).

The fashion industry does not cater to purity in holiness but caters to pride, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. Bare shoulders, short skirts, split skirts, revealing tops, tight clothing - all can silently allure mens lustful appetites. They can cause a stumblingblock with terrible consequences. We are not advocating a legalistic laying down of rules here but a *concern* for our brothers and sisters in Christ! In particular, this is a plea for women to consider the *weaknesses* in men!

One should rather serve Christ with their apparel by expressing humility, self denial and sobriety, to draw others to imitate them. ***'Know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's',*** (1Cor.6:19-20).

Immodesty gives ground to Satan, the prince of this world; but our modesty glorifies the temple of the Holy Spirit, in which dwells the Spirit of our saviour!

The world is well aware that certain kinds of feminine dress are provocative and tempting to the eyes and minds of men. Yet, why are so many *Christian* women so naive and stubbornly ignorant of this?

This author has had some women say 'but I am not attractive anyway, so there should not be a problem with how I dress'. My answer is this: 'who are you to judge such? And how do you know in particular what might be attractive to every man? And what about your example to the young Christians and youth who might copy you?'. A woman's beauty and sexuality is designed to be kept for her husband or future husband; it is not for *any* man!

Legalism?:

Is it legalism to call people to modesty when the Word of God does just that? Is it legalism to ask why Christians follow the fashions of this age when scripture forbids just that, (Rom.12:2)? Is it legalism to plead to women to stop showing flesh to the eyegates of men who could fall in sin when scripture *commands* us not to cause a 'stumblingblock'? (Rom.14:13; 1Cor.8:9).

The author is not asking for Christians to dress like monks or like Elizabethan women laden down with heavy cumbersome attire. Such might not relate to the lost world around us. But we can still modestly cover up and dress so as not to raise any issue of immodesty with the saints, and yet still 'relate' well to earthlings!

The 'Thin Edge':

Too often I find Christians want to dress as close to the worldly 'line' of what they think is 'immodest'. This attitude is rampant amongst Christians and is surely a stench in the nostril of God! *This is not what true holiness is about. Holiness is moving away from* the world, rather than hanging as close as we can get to it's immodest 'line'!

Then there is the pathetic argument that everyone is wearing this or that and 'others are more immodest than I'. It will do no good to point fingers or compare with others. We are accountable to God not for what others are doing but for what we are doing.

I am about to tackle a subject that will no doubt raise the ire of many because it is *personal*. There will be people on one side who will think I have not gone far enough; and there will be others who will say I have gone too far and am 'legalistic'. This article is not written to tell you how to dress in some form of outdated Elizabethan design of clothes. But this article is an endeavour to lay down *principles of modesty* with some *suggested applications*. Increasingly, pastors/elders who are teaching scripture and not wanting to be conformed to the world, are grappling with and grieving over immodesty in their own churches.

There are simply no definite guidelines laid down in scripture as to what exactly we should wear for any particular occasion. However, this article could challenge any false notions we might have of 'Christian liberty'.

The world is rapidly coming into the church to take the church into the world and no area is more noticeable in this onslaught than with the effect of the fashion industry and immodesty.

What Is 'Modesty'?

Most secular dictionaries describe modesty as: *decency of behaviour and dress*. Biblically there are at least two scriptures that give us clear teaching on 'modesty':

Firstly, 1Timothy 2:8-10 ***'I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array. But (which becomes women professing godliness) with good works'.***

Paul in this epistle to Timothy begins in verse 8 with the subject of personal holiness, (vs.8 'holy hands'). The issue of modesty is essentially about holiness. The phrase ***'in like manner'*** links the inner holiness (***'holy hands'***) to personal or outer holiness, in what women would wear.

A study of the words in this passage will tell much about 'modesty'. The verb ***'adorn'*** is *'kosmeó'*, a Greek word from the noun *'kosmos'* which is literally 'order; arrangement; system'. What is within should show in the same 'order' or 'system' as on the outside. This outside adorning should show what is within ***'in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety'***.

The ***'modest apparel'*** is a phrase for what used to be called 'deportment', which is the conduct or behavioural attributes we show towards other people. It signifies that which is clean, neat, and decent. 'Modest' is the Greek *'kosmios'* meaning 'order, arrangement, seemly'. The same word is used for the character qualifications of an elder in 1Timothy 3:2. *Modesty is closely associated with character.*

The word ***'apparel'*** (*'katastéllo'*) originally signified a long robe which reached down to the feet.

'Shamefacedness' (*'aidoús'*) is a blend of modesty and humility. It is having an honourable shame; a moral shame to anything dishonourable in fashion. It is elsewhere also translated 'reverence', (Heb.12:28).

The word ***'sobriety'*** is a key word in this passage which refers to a sanity, temperance, a moderation of desires, passions and conduct. The word shows the well-balanced state of mind arising from habitual *self-restraint*. 'Sobriety' is crucial to interpreting this passage! It is a voluntary limitation of one's freedom of thought and behaviour; one who recognizes their abilities and limitations. This is really what 'modesty' is about - character and *unselfish restraint!*

The phrase ***'braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array'*** arguably need not be forced out of its context. The sense is that these things could be opposed to 'modest apparel'. The point of the whole passage is t*he '**manner'** of dress outward needs to match what is the holiness within.*

Secondly, 1Peter 3:2-4 ***'While they behold your chaste conversation*** [conduct] ***coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting*** [braiding] ***the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel*** [garments]; ***But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price'.***

Likewise in this epistle by Peter, *holiness* is the subject, 'chaste' being a cognate of the word for 'holy'. The word *'conversation'* is an old word for mode of life, conduct or *behaviour.*

Again, the *outward* adorning is compared to the inward. Both need to match up in holiness and character. The ***'outward adorning'*** needs to show a character of a ***'meek and quiet spirit'***. This 'spirit' is one that reflects the indwelling Holy Spirit - a gentleness, not agitated, but one of *restraint* and *self control.*

would Bathsheba expose herself in an open place in view of the Kings palace? Was the undressing flaunting? Is there not a lesson here for women? Yes, men should not yield to looking at women with lustful eyes; but women should also be careful to not give them too much to look at! Sadly, I find many Christian women's attitude to this is: 'but men should not be 'perverts'; 'they should get their thoughts out of the gutter!' But my answer is a rebuke to such women!: 'Women, don't unnecessarily give them anything in the 'gutter' to look at!' Yes, be it known that men are 'perverted' - all men! Our perfect purity was lost in the fall of Adam and Eve, and our hearts are naturally inclined to sin, including the sin of lust! Sin easily besets us, (Heb.12:1). To women I say: *'Real love for your brethren would remove this selfish attitude to dress as one pleases!'* ***'We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification'***, (Rom.15:1,2). The very essence of 'modesty' is to restrain oneself! Again, don't let the 'outward adorning' (fashions) override the 'inner man of the heart', (1Pet.3:4).

No doubt some men will look at a woman despite how she dresses, but why make this worse and further the possibility of temptation by showing skin in sensuous places or with tight clothing? Will God excuse the woman because the man was feeding his lust? It was a strong man of God who was overcome by the allurement of Bathsheba! We are told clearly not to put a 'stumbling block' in anyones way, (Rom. 15:1; 14:13). Surely, the church environment should be a place where one, even a man, can find a safehouse from the evil and immodesty that is already rife in the world?

The consequences when women put a 'stumbling block' before men can be enormous. Over many years in church life I have seen some men fall into sexual sin and I have counselled many others who have privately struggled with their lusts. I can say with all assurance that it is not made any better with the way some Christian women dress! The consequences are serious and many women will surely answer to the Lord in the judgement! David committed adultery, then to cover it up he murdered. In punishment, his child died and he lost the kingdom to a rebellious son. And his wives were later 'defiled' in the sight of all Israel - huge consequences!

attractive or sensuous. Then why is it that so many Christian women would wear short skirts above the knee? And why is it that many women seem not to take into account what happens to their skirts when they bend over or sit?

And what of **skirts split** well up the sides? Whether women like it or not, such glimpses of nude legs and thighs are a provocation to lust in the eyes of men. Why is it that so many Christian women today cannot see that the *design* of such a fashion is to expose thighs to *view*? And who would be 'looking' - mostly men!

The same is true of **revealing tops**. Several buttons undone on a blouse can be provocative and even seductive to a man. There are few areas of a woman that are more alluring to men than a woman's breast.

One of the most difficult areas I have found in church life in regards to womens dress is **tight clothing.** Many Christian women are blind to the effects of such. Tight clothing reveals a women's form and shape. It can and does tantalise the imagination of men. Tops, dresses, slacks, jeans, etc. are all items which can be worn tight to show a woman's shape and figure. Here it would be easy to be involved in a debate about whether women should wear 'slacks' or not. But the point of modesty is often bypassed in this debate. The question is, is the type of clothes worn *revealing* and therefore immodest?

The Effect on Men:

My experience in church life is that most Christian women today are simply unaware of the effect immodesty has on men in regards to tight clothing or the revealing of the body! Sadly, it is quite rare to find a woman who actually understands the effect her clothing, or lack of, has on others. It's simple - womens dress can incite lust and passions in men! And *this is serious* - the Bible says that when a man even looks upon a woman with lust he has already committed adultery! (Matt.5:28).

Although it will often be the 'weaker' men who will fall into sin, the example of David should make us all want to steer well clear of immodesty. In 1Samuel chapter 11 David was tempted when he saw Bathsheba in a state of undress as she washed herself. He fell into sin with disastrous consequences. Many readers might blame David alone for his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. But what of the woman? Why

The scripture here is not saying that the woman neglect her personal appearance, but rather that her heart be not *set* on the ***'outward adorning'*** with such things as hairstyles and expensive jewellery. Her outward display *should reflect the holiness of character within.* This concept of modesty is close to 'humility' and is the opposite of boldness, arrogance or 'showiness'. Such is the underlining principle of 'modesty'. *Modesty is first an issue of the heart!*

Both Paul and Peter are teaching that when such character is *inside*, the result *outside* should be *'modest apparel'.*

The Fashion Industry:

The root of immodesty goes back to Adam and Eve. When they sinned with 'the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life' (1Jn.2:16), they *rebelled* against God. Yet God gave them a gracious *covering* of 'coats' (Gen.3:21) to cover the now naked shame of the effects of sin. Nakedness is a reminder of when sin first entered the world. It is this inherent sense of shame that the fashion industry would do away with. Included in the word 'modesty' is an understanding of a sense of shame, hence the word ***'shamefacedness'*** in 1Timothy 2:9. Although the Christian today has been 'regenerated', there still exists a sense of honourable shame - a modest reserve which has a *restraining* effect. Today the modern fashion industry is relentlessly attempting to erode that inherent sense of shame which naturally exists with nakedness, (Rev.3:18).

Down through many centuries there was little change in thought on modesty in dress until in one single generation in the 20th century! Even the slightest research into the history of the modern fashion industry will demonstrate that *it has shaped and moulded public opinion*. Many historical articles could be cited that show the history of *swimwear* in particular is connected to our changing perceptions of modesty. Many authors cite the swimsuit fashions as being the force in the 'undressing' of America If one looks at the designs year by year one can see it is less and less fabric and more and more show of body. It began with womens arms and shoulders being exposed. In the 1920's legs and backs were progressively displayed. In the 1930's 'cleavage' appeared, which included the separation between a woman's breast. The 'overskirt' then disappeared A two piece swimsuit appeared in 1935 with a small amount

of flesh bared between the two parts. At first there was resistance to this, but by 1940 it was common. In the 60' and 70's the navel was exposed and 'high cuts' revealed hips. Later in the 70's thighs were exposed.

Mens fashions showed a similar progression, but the fashion industry in its 'undressing' has made much more money in womens fashions than mens. It is sure that modesty applies to men as well as women but a state of undress does not affect women as it does men. Women are not aroused in the same way by the *sight* of a man's body, in comparison to a man seeing a women in a state of undress. Most women will admit this freely, since they are not affected visually in the same way as a man. Some authors believe the seduction principle in womens fashions is the 'lust of the eyes', but in mens fashions it has been more the 'pride of life', (1Jn.2:16)

When the fashion industry pushed the boundaries of undressing in the 20th century, there was a constant battle that went on between what people were not wearing and the laws of the times. The result was that the laws were forced to change with the relentlessness of the new fashions.

The reader might well ask why it did not go all the way to full nudity. The reason is partly because, (as men well know), partial nudity is usually more erotic and sensuous than full nudity. It tends to play more on the effect of tantalising the imagination.

Over decades the fashion industry made the statement that clothing (or lack of) says 'sex', 'pride', 'boldness' 'rebellion'. The fashion statements were meant to first reveal and then arouse and even shock.

Centuries ago the Puritan leaders such as John Owen warned Christians of the corrupting influences of the European fashion industry. John Bunyan wrote: *'Why are they going for their...naked shoulders, and paps hanging out like a cow's bag? Why are they painting their faces, for stretching out their neck and for putting of themselves unto all the formalities which proud fancy leads them to? Is it because they would honour God? Because they would adorn the Gospel? Because they would beautify religion and make sinners to fall in love with their own salvation? No, it is rather to please their lusts...I also believe that Satan has drawn more into the sin of uncleanliness by the spangling show of fine clothes, than he would have possibly have drawn unto it without them. I wonder what it was that of old was called the attire of a harlot;*

certainly it could not be more bewitching and tempting than are the garments of many professors this day'.

The fashion industry at its root is *rebellious* against the law of the lands and against God. Anyone who would disagree with this would only need to sit and watch the award winning advertisements in the fashion industry. But this should not surprise us, as the fashion industry is the mood swinger of the world's desires. As a result, the worldview of 'modesty' has changed dramatically!

Romans 12:2 teaches clearly that Christians ***'be not conformed to this world'***. The word ***'conformed'*** ('*suschematízo*') literally means 'fashioned' in an outward sense. The passage can be translated: *'Don't be moulded by the external and passing fashions of this age'*. Christians are not to copy those of the world in their overly attention to fashion.

Applications...and a Word to Women:

The scriptures we have already looked at are written to women although the principle of modesty apply to both men and women. But because the Bible clearly mentions women in this area, this article will focus on that area of immodesty.

Scripture passages teach that the exposure of one's private parts is shameful. The Hebrew culture saw it as indiscreet for people to cast off garments and expose parts of the body. Today, *any apparel designed to draw the eye to the erotic zones of the body cannot fill the requirements for Biblical modesty. Many Christian women will say they dress 'modestly'*. But if they are following the fashions of this age, are they really dressing modestly? Can it honestly be said that bare backs, bare stomachs, bare legs and thighs, etc, are modest in church life? Shorts, swimming suits and any 'apparel' which intentionally leave one partially nude, surely have no place in the dress of a woman professing godliness and aspiring to 'modesty'. It should not matter what the world is doing...and why should we 'conform' to it when scripture forbids this? (Rom.12:2). And neither should it matter what the rest of the modern church is doing in this matter; why should we 'conform' to the apostasy of the church in these days?

Do we conform to the **short skirts** of the world? How long should a dress be? Most men will agree that somewhere above the knee can be