

# The Shame Of Nakedness

by Casey Head

The issue of modesty is one of the most controversial in the Lord's church today. Every church will have to deal with the issue of modesty at one point or another, which means that the sooner we understand the subject, the better. How short is too short? How tight is too tight? These are questions that Christians often ask, and the fact is, if we *only* debate the issue of modesty, we will never come to a point of agreement. In order to answer these questions, we must discuss the shame of nakedness. Let me clarify...

It is often said that standards of modesty vary from culture to culture. In some areas of the world, for example, it may be normal and modest for women to wear short skirts and revealing tops, if they wear anything at all. African tribes are cited as examples of this. What we would consider to be naked, they might consider to be modest. On the other hand, hundreds of years ago in Victorian Europe, it was considered shameful and immodest for a woman to expose even her ankles. The same can be said of certain Islamic countries in the Middle East. Clearly, standards of modesty vary from culture to culture. What is acceptable in one culture may be shameful in another. Furthermore, modesty involves more than skirt length and "top exposure." It also involves tightness. A woman can cover her entire body with cloth but still be considered immodest if the cloth is skin tight, revealing every curve of her body. The kind of fabric may factor into modesty, as well as the design. For example, it is popular for blue jeans nowadays to be faded or to have writing in the area of the rear pockets. This is meant to draw attention to that area. Again, the buttocks here are covered, but that doesn't necessarily equate modesty. As you can see, there are many factors to consider when we discuss the issue of modesty. The Bible does instruct us to be modest (1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 3:2-3).

While the standards of modesty may vary from culture to culture, there is something that is constant- the shame of nakedness. This is where so many Christians fall short, as they lump the shame of nakedness and modesty together and try to conclude that both are cultural. One may be cultural to some extent, but the other is certainly not.

In the garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned, they both realized that they were naked. In Genesis 3:7, they tried to resolve this problem by sewing together aprons of fig leaves. No one else was around, but they were still naked and needed to fix it. Their solution, however, was not good enough. We are told in verse 21, "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them." Do you see the point? The issue was not modesty, but rather nakedness! The Hebrews word for "coats" is "kethoneth," and means, "garment, robe, tunic, a long shirt-like garment usually of linen."

Again, the point is made in Exodus 28:42, "And thou shalt make them linen breeches to *cover their nakedness*; from the loins even unto the thighs they shall reach." These were instructions for the priests of the Old Testament, but the point is made here, just as it was in Genesis 3 that their nakedness needed to be covered. What is nakedness? When it comes to the lower body, we find that the area from the loins to the knees is referred to as "nakedness." This would tell us that in order to cover our nakedness, our skirt or shorts must cover the thighs, reaching even unto the knees.

Finally, it says in Isaiah 47:2, "Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bear the leg, *uncover the thigh*, pass over the rivers. Thy *nakedness shall be uncovered*." In this context, God is dealing with the sins of Babylon. The point is again made that uncovering the thigh is the same is uncovering one's nakedness. The issue here is the shame of nakedness, not modesty, and as you can see, this is an unchanging point throughout the scriptures.

When we talk about modesty, yes, there may be some disagreements. We can talk about the tightness of clothes or the design and fabric used and how modesty is defined differently in different cultures. However, we must recognize the points made throughout the Bible regarding the shame of nakedness. Uncovering the area between the shoulders and thigh, as seen in the three passages above, is the same is revealing our nakedness. Let us not rebel against God for the sake of "fashion."