

Celebrating Biblical Womanhood: Godly Garments¹

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Editor's Note: The following is the second in a series of columns on the issue of modesty by Nancy Leigh DeMoss. This series on modesty originally aired in the form of a three week radio broadcast, beginning June 16, 2003. Her radio program—"Revive Our Hearts"—is heard on more than 250 stations.

Clothing can make life hard. Whose idea was it to wear clothes anyway? Do clothes really matter?

To answer these questions we need to go back to the beginning—to the first three chapters of Genesis—and see how all this “clothing stuff” got started. In this passage, we see a four-part progression, a sequence of events that took place back in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. This narrative has a lot of bearing on how we got to where we are today.

Now in Genesis chapter one and in the first part of chapter two, we have the whole story of creation. At the end of chapter one we are told that God looked at everything He had made and said it was “very good.”

Then, beginning in Gen 2:20, there's a description of God making a helper suitable for the man. God made the woman and gave her to the man. That was good, too, for after the man and woman had been united, we read in Gen 2:25: “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (ESV).²

Here's the first phase in the whole development of clothing: Originally, there was no clothing and there was no shame and no guilt. Adam and Eve were in a sinless condition,

so there was no shame. They had no knowledge of evil, so nakedness prior to the Fall was innocent. It was not shameful.

Now then, we come to Genesis 3, and we see the entrance of the enemy. The serpent challenges the woman and then the man, who follows suit, to disobey God's commandment not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In verse 5 the serpent said to the woman: “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened.” So, verse 6 tells us that “when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.” This was the first human sin.

God said, “No.”

Eve said, “Yes.”

God said, “Don't.”

Eve said, “I will.”

Now what's the very next thing that happened? Immediately in verse 7, “Then the eyes of both were opened.”

And isn't that what the serpent had said would happen? “Your eyes will be opened.” But their eyes were opened in a way that they had not anticipated. Their eyes were opened to experience evil and shame for the first time. Their consciences were rudely awakened because they had gone

against the Word of God.

What happened as soon as their eyes were opened? “They *knew* that they were naked.” According to the Hebrew used here, this was not a dawning or gradual realization. They had instant perception. All of a sudden they looked and they realized, “We’re naked.” Innocence was replaced with shame and guilt.

So now we come to the second phase in the development of clothing. At this juncture there are still no clothes, but now there’s shame, guilt, and embarrassment. Just consider your natural reaction when you’re not fully dressed and someone accidentally walks in on you. How do you feel when that happens? One word: embarrassed.

And that’s exactly what Adam and Eve were at that point. The first thing they learned after they ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was that they were naked. And this knowledge brought them shame. From this point on in Scripture, nakedness is always referred to as something that is shameful, except in the context of a husband and wife.

Following the realization of their nakedness and the onset of their shame, we see Adam and Eve come to the third stage of development, in which, according to Gen 3:7, “they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings” (NASB). The first thing they did was to try and deal with their shame or their guilt by covering up their nakedness.

Now the word for “loin covering” is translated differently in different translations, but essentially it is a word that means “aprons.” It’s a belt for the waist. So, what Adam and Eve did, in effect, was to cover up their private parts. That was man’s plan. And it was man’s plan without God. They did this entirely of their own initiative. They didn’t ask God, “What should we do about this problem?”

However, as we go on in the passage we discover that, apparently, Adam and Eve realized those fig leaves were not adequate for covering, because when we come to verses 8 – 10, they’re still embarrassed and afraid.

Verse 8 reads: “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” Adam and Eve did instinctively what we would do today if someone were accidentally to walk in a room when we were not fully dressed. Just as we would try to cover ourselves, Adam and Eve, in their embarrassment and fear, attempted to hide from God.

Verses 9 and 10 then tell us: “The LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ He said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was

naked, and I hid myself.’” So, even though they were covered with fig-leaf aprons, they still felt that they were naked, and they instinctively concluded that they needed to hide from God.

Now, it’s interesting to note that though nakedness was the first thing that Adam and Eve were concerned about, their nakedness does not appear to be the first thing that God was concerned about. Why is that? Because it was not the heart of the matter. We do indeed see that God was concerned about their clothing situation, and he did do something about it. But it wasn’t the first thing God was concerned about.

As Christian women, we need to remember this as we try to reach women, in our secular culture, who aren’t adequately clothed. Let’s keep in mind that what they’re wearing or not wearing is not the heart of the matter. It needs to be dealt with in its time, but it’s not the first or most important issue.

In the Garden, we see that God was most concerned about the relationship that had been broken. “Where are you” (v 9)? “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat” (v 11)? He was concerned about the fact that they had disobeyed his Word and broken his commandment.

And so God dealt first not with their nakedness but with the newly broken relationship between them and their Maker. In the rest of chapter three then, we find God talking to Adam and Eve and the serpent about the consequences and curses for their disobedience. In an astonishing display of grace though, God not only declares his judgment, but he also announces the gospel—the wonderful promise that a Savior would come, who would redeem them out of their fallenness (Gen 3:15).

The issue of Adam and Eve’s clothing—which is not to be ignored—only comes up for treatment in the wake of the gospel promise. In Gen 3:21, God finally makes provision for their nakedness: “The LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin and clothed them.” This is God’s provision. In a manner of speaking, this is God saying, “You cannot solve your sinful problems on your own. Your plan—those fig-leaf aprons—won’t work. But I am going to make provision for you.”

The word “garments” is the same word that is translated elsewhere in the Bible as “coats” or “tunics.” It’s a word that consistently refers to an item of clothing that covers the body from, at least, the neck to the knees, sometimes going down to the mid-calf or even all the way to the feet.

You see, Adam and Eve covered their private parts. But what did God cover? Their bodies. God said that it wasn’t enough that their private parts should be covered. Now that they had sinned, their bodies needed to be covered. Of course,

this passage foreshadows that when Christ would come he would be the Lamb of God who would be slain so that we could be covered in his righteousness.

The dominant theme is certainly the gracious work of God that both required and provided a sacrifice. But I think there's also an application here that relates to the issue of clothing, and it is partially seen in the fact that cultures built on godly principles understand the need to cover the body.

In drastic contrast, contemporary culture has its own idea of clothing, and typically that idea is simply to uncover as much of the body as possible. "Just take it off." That's the broader cultural motto when it comes to clothing. But the godly woman is counter-cultural. She's willing to go against what is typical and say, "Look, these fig-leaf aprons are not sufficient. That's man's plan, not God's." The godly woman is willing to submit to God's plan, accept his provision, and say, "God's provision is what is really good." ■■

¹Excerpted from Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *The Look: Does God Really Care What I Wear?* (Niles, Mich.: Revive Our Hearts, 2003). For information on Nancy's three week radio series on Modesty, the Modesty Packet (including two booklets) and other great resources, please visit www.ReviveOurHearts.com.

²All subsequent citations of Scripture will be taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted.