

# **A MODEST HANDMAID**

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When the angel was talking to Mary, recorded in Luke chapter 2, Mary was startled. The angel was telling her things she doubtless never imagined would happen to her! However, Mary realized she needed to hope in the Lord, and then she makes a startling statement. “And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 2: 38). What made Mary a handmaid of the Lord? Were there certain characteristics that made her stand apart from all the other women?

I sincerely believe that Mary was a young woman who displayed modesty. What is modesty, though? Is it a simple belief that our grandmothers and great-grandmothers possessed or is it still crucial today? Yes, I believe it is needed today, and in the following paragraphs, I wish to explain to you my personal belief of modesty.

A main area that handmaidens need to be modest in is in their behavior toward men. I Timothy 2:9 reads, “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array.” We do not commonly hear *shamefacedness* and *sobriety* used today. *Sobriety* means *self-control*, and shamefacedness, according to the Greek, literally means *bashfulness or having downcast eyes toward men*. This is amazing! Of course, this does not mean we cannot talk to men, but rather, that we should be guarded when we communicate with them. We should not talk in a boisterous manner, because that would go against shamefacedness. We ought not to laugh in a silly, giggly manner, as that would go against shamefacedness. A meek and quiet spirit would also define shamefacedness.

We, as handmaids, are not to be known. No, I do not mean that people are not to know

our names or that we are not supposed to do things out in the open. I think Proverbs 31:23 gives an example of this. “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.” Her husband is the one that is known in the gates! Will no one ever notice her? Verse 31 tells us the answer. “Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.” It is very important how we appear to the world. We may be the only “Bible” they see, so it is exceedingly important to have a good testimony towards men.

While we must be careful how we act around men, we must also be careful of our presentation to the world by our bodies. Some people think that it is unbiblical to wear perfume, ointment, or scented lotion. They believe that since perfume is made from companies who put scents in perfume to arouse wrong desires, it is wrong to wear any variety of perfume or lotion. I believe it is fine to wear scented perfume or lotion; I think we just need to have discernment in what companies we purchase from and why we want to wear perfume. Do we wear perfume to get attention, or do we wear it to smell pleasant? A friend of mine said, “We need to be attractive to the world in a godly way—our hair clean and fluffy, our clothes clean and modest, and our bodies smelling clean.” Proverbs 27:9a says, “Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart.” Do you recall when Jesus went to Lazarus’ house and Christ’s disciples were there? Mary poured ointment on Christ’s feet; the smell was so strong that it filled the house! (Read John 12:1-3.) Jesus did not reprimand her. Rather, He praised her. If we want to have a good testimony to others, we ought to smell clean.

Ointment is not the only way to smell pleasant. Taking a daily bath, using deodorant, and daily changing clothes are just two other ways smell agreeable. Remember, no one will want to be around us if we smell repulsive!

Our clothing, the way we dress, must honor the Lord as well. This is a very touchy subject

with many people, but I firmly believe that it needs to be addressed. Deuteronomy 22:5 states, “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.” “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array” (I Timothy 2:9). What is *modest apparel* that the Apostle Paul says women are to “adorn themselves in”? *Modest* means *orderly*, so our clothes should be clean and ironed. As handmaidens, we represent Christ and we should unquestionably look our best. Therefore, is our clothing simply to be neat, or is there more to this verse than first meets the eye? Upon looking *apparel* up in a concordance, I was startled with the definition. The Greek word means *long robe*. Pants are definitely not a long robe! Skirts, jumpers, dresses, and some culottes fall under that category. Even the world knows that pants do not pertain to women. Next time you use the restroom at a public place, look at the doors. On which door is someone wearing a dress? The women’s door has a woman wearing a dress! The men’s door certainly does not have that picture but rather has a picture of a man wearing pants. Is that not interesting? Also, it was not until the 1900’s that women started wearing pants in public. When they did, it was met with strong disapproval!

It is also critical to realize that we can still be immodest by wearing a dress, skirt, etc. There are four points to remember when purchasing or making clothing. We must make sure our clothing is long, has a high neckline, is made of thick fabric (not sheer), and is loose. (For long clothing, please read Isaiah 47:1-3.) In *Dressing for the Lord*, by David Cloud, he quotes a letter from a fifty-five-year-old man. “I beg you, preacher, tell them [women] that wearing ANYTHING that draws attention to a particular area, accentuating ANY form or flesh, is a great distraction for me. Please, stop wearing TIGHT clothing, exposing flesh, and wearing articles of clothing with writing

on them” (pg. 185). Another man stated, “Why should a man have to battle with lust during a church service when it is hard enough just to walk in a world full of sensuality? If women only knew the snare of temptation that is set before our eyes” (pg. 188). Sisters, that ought to warn us! “A woman in a nice dress with little exposed is pleasing to the eye and stops at that” (pg. 189), another man agreed.

I have a personal standard for my apparel. I want it to cover the knee easily; I do not wish to pull and tug my skirt when I sit down to make it cover the knee. I do not want slits in my clothing because that has a “peek-a-boo” effect. I like my sleeves to just about reach my elbow or longer. I prefer small prints and not gaudy colors. Lace on the bodice is not for me because it draws attention there. Does this seem like a list of “do’s” and “don’ts” that must be obeyed? Actually, I feel it is *freedom*; freedom to know that I am obeying Christ in my personal convictions and not arousing sensual desires!

However, we can be immodest in other areas besides clothing. By wearing excessive amounts of jewelry or wearing make-up, we can be immodest. A few people believe it is wrong to wear jewelry; I do not believe that, but I do appreciate how they are trying to obey Christ in that way. I Timothy 2:9, quoted previously, says that women are not to adorn themselves with “broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array”. Is this verse saying that it is wrong to wear jewelry, braid our hair, and wear expensive clothing? I believe it is yes and no. Concerning the first, I believe it is fine to wear jewelry. Many godly people in the Old Testament wore jewelry. Just one was Rebekah when Abraham’s servant gave her the jewelry. I had heard that the Jews started the custom of wedding rings. The Jews were God’s chosen people, so I decided to look up *gold*, used in I Timothy 2:9, to see exactly what it meant. (No, I do not look up everything; just when I am perplexed which is quite often!) The concordance stated that only in extravagant

amounts is it wrong to wear jewelry. *In moderation*, I believe it is fine to wear rings, necklaces, and bracelets. However, I think it is wrong to wear earrings (or, for that matter, any rings that require piercing!). When Jacob had a revival and became godlier, he commanded his family to do something. “Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and *all their earrings which were in their ears*” (Genesis 35:2-4; emphasis mine). Is it not amazing that God counted strange gods and earrings the same? Also, note that the only jewelry that was relinquished was earrings! Leviticus 19:28 talks about not cutting our flesh. As for braided hair, I believe it is only wrong if you put all sorts of decorations in the hair. (The Greek explains this.) Why do we need expensive clothing? Paul wrote, “And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content” (I Timothy 6:8). We should show our moderation in all things.

Another external, besides jewelry, is our hair. Is there a Biblical guideline for us as modest handmaids? First, as we noticed prior, it is fine to braid our hair simply. I Corinthians 11:15 makes it clear that women ought to have long hair. “But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.” Furthermore, I believe that once a handmaid of the Lord reaches a certain age, she ought to cover her hair. Many people say, “Doesn’t the previous verse just say that a woman’s hair is her covering?” First, men are not to have long hair. (See verse 14 of the same chapter.) If a woman’s hair is her covering, men would have to shave their heads! Secondly, verse six states, “For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.” For the sake of those who believe the hair is the covering, let me quote this verse again in that light. “For if the woman be not

covered [her hair removed], let her also be shorn [her hair cut]: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven [her hair cut], let her be covered [her hair on].” How could the first part of the verse work? It would be impossible! Some women bring up verse 15, which says that the hair is the covering. The hair is *a* covering, but I do not believe it is *the* covering. In verse 15, the word *covering* is a noun; in all the other verses, it is a verb. God has already provided His handmaids a *natural covering*, her hair. However, God wants us to *cover* our heads; this is something *we* must do! Lastly, Isaiah has a word about head coverings. “Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate. Take the mill stones, and grind meal: *uncover thy locks*, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers. Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea thy shame shall be seen” (Isaiah 47:1-3; emphasis mine). It is also interesting to note that up until recently, women always wore something on her head-especially to church.

There are three reasons why I believe we must cover our hair. First, we must cover for modesty; our hair is our *glory*! Secondly, we must be covered for prayer. Lastly, it shows our submission.

Handmaidens must not only be covered but have God-honoring speech. What would it matter if we dressed properly and Biblically but yet spoke vile things? Our speech is always to be honest. Speaking of the Proverbs 7 woman, the Bible says, “With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him” (Proverbs 7:21). A good verse to remember is Colossians 4:6. “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” Our speech should not always ramble; rather, we should speak necessary things. Read Proverbs 25:11. Titus 2:8 explains to us specifically what sort of speech we ought to have. “Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the

contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.” What a testimony!

However, no matter how hard we try to keep our speech God-honoring, unless our thoughts are right, our speech will never be right. “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34). An excellent guideline to follow is Philippians 4:8. “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” That does not leave *any* room for evil thoughts!

Making sure we are in fellowship with God will help keep our thoughts right. When our thoughts are desirable, our speech will be godly. After that, our clothing and other areas of our lives will please God.

Pleasing God by being a modest handmaid is not always easy. However, if we can remember this simple acronym, *modest*, followed throughout this whole essay, it will guide us in becoming a handmaid of the Lord like Mary was. We must simply remember our attitude toward *men*, consider our testimony by *ointment* and perfume, and keep in mind how we present ourselves in *dress*. Proper *externals* will help us honor God, as well as *speech* and *thoughts*. I encourage you to memorize I Peter 2:9. Not only will it encourage you, but it will also give a reason for why you desire to be a *modest handmaiden*. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness unto his marvellous light.”

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