

The Godly Virtue of Modesty

by
Michael Rudolph

All places where believers assemble have an expectation of decorum and respect for godly standards of dress, and behavior, and Ohev is not an exception. At its recent American Executive Team meeting, the Tikkun leaders developed a statement of modesty expected of those of us who attend Tikkun gatherings. Scott, Sherry, and I have attempted to tweak Tikkun's statement for Ohev, and I would like to present it to you now as a guideline for your consideration; it is not an official Ohev standard, but it does represent my view. Here is the statement:

“Modesty can be difficult to define, because it varies in different cultures, at different events, and in different time periods. It is different for a congregational service than for a social event, a wedding, a *bar* or *bat mitzvah* reception, a picnic, a birthday party, or a *chavurah* meeting. Yet, there are also many similarities.

Modest attire is that which does not call attention to the body in ways that are likely to provoke lust. While it is recognized that men are not regarded by women in the same ways that women are by men, it would be considered immodest for either a man or a woman to draw excessive attention to his or her appearance. This could be through ostentatious makeup or hairstyles, excessive use of jewelry, piercings or tattoos, or clothing that is overly tight, explicit, or too revealing. Modest dress draws attention to the face, and ideally the face reflects the glory of God.

It is recognized that, in today's American culture, piercings and tattoos are becoming more accepted. Generally, though increasingly fashionable, these practices ARE designed to draw attention to the body and are often used in ways that do NOT reflect the glory of God. If visible, body piercing jewelry should be limited in number, location, and size. Tattoos also should be covered as much as is possible. 1 Peter 3:3-4 continues to apply, even today:

Do not let your adornment be merely outward – arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel – rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.”

You will notice that the statement is written as a general guideline and does not state specifics. That is intentional, because there are so many variations of ways to dress and so many cultural norms of dress and appearance, that anything stated with more specificity will not be defensible for all situations. Each case of dress has to be considered on its individual merits. What I hope to achieve by writing this is that all of us would be discerning in what we choose to wear – especially during holy gatherings.

We usually make decisions about what we wear based on how we think we look, but others sometimes do not see us as we see ourselves. Therefore, please allow grace to any elder or elder's wife who may approach you regarding the modesty of your appearance at services, and comply with any request or suggestion they may have as best you can.

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