

# American Decency Association

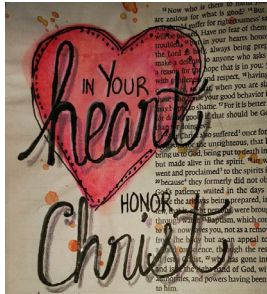
PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

August 2016

## Bikinis and Modesty

By: John Piper



*Summer has arrived, and with it, renewed questions about modesty in to the inbox. So, Pastor John, can you speak into the issue of modesty regarding clothing at the pool — especially bikinis. And speak to pastors and leaders. Should they take time to directly address the topic? And if so, how would you counsel such a brave pastor best step through that minefield?*

Here is the most important thing to say. It is impossible to come into a church or a youth ministry or a school,... that is permeated with immodesty and fix it with rules about modesty. There is a place for rules... But if you try

to turn that thing around... by starting with the rules or the guidelines, it will not accomplish a Christ-exalting, gospel-rooted, Spirit-empowered, faith-sustained, Bible-informed, joyful, free culture of modesty. It won't. And yet that is the goal.

“Until you count everything as loss compared to the supreme value of knowing Christ, your attitude towards your clothing and your appearance will be controlled by forces that don't honor Christ.”

So, my approach was never to start with the rules or the guidelines, but to start with God and the gospel and the Bible and the Spirit and faith and joy. Deep things need to happen in a woman's and a man's soul before they have any chance of thinking and feeling about these things in a way that honors God. ... Until God has become your treasure, until your own sin has become the thing you hate most, until the Word of God is your supreme authority that you feel to be more precious than gold,

sweeter than honey, until the gospel of Christ's death in your place is the most precious news in the world to you, until you have learned to deny yourself short-term pleasures for the sake of long-term joy and holiness, until you have grown to love the Holy Spirit and long for his fruit more than man's praise, until you count everything as loss compared to the supreme value of knowing Christ, your attitude towards your clothing and your appearance will be controlled by forces that don't honor Christ.

Every pastor can see we have got ... deep soul-work to do. Which means, for a pastor, that 99 percent of his effort will be the establishment in the heart of these glorious, supernatural works of God. He will preach and teach and worship and model in himself and in his family how the gospel changes everything. And he will realize that, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word and through faith, his church will be split between two kinds of carnal people: One group

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will bristle at every mention of modesty and say, “How dare you tell me or my children how to dress!” That’s a bad attitude and it is carnal. But the other group will put all their emphasis on outward appearance with little sense of the heart and that it is supremely important. And these two groups can never know peace. They both have failed. Neither are deeply transformed by the gospel.

So, my counsel is: Teach your people these things year-in and year-out. Expose the pride of licentiousness and self-will, and expose the pride of externalism and formalism that has no heart in it. It doesn’t see the gospel as precious. You preach and you pray for a gospel-culture where men and women have ... a sweet submission to Christ, a saturation with the Word of God, a humble attentiveness to the wisdom of others, a desire to grow and learn, a deep suspicion of the power of worldliness to control our

habits, and a loving consideration of others when we choose what we wear.

And when the time is right ... you take up the texts like 1 Timothy 2:8–9, “I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control.” And you work through it, making sure that everyone feels that the Bible really does care about how we dress. And it really does want us to dress in a way that is rooted in humble, joyful, Christ-exalting, other-serving, gospel faith. Here are three closing practical tips from my experience:

1) When it comes to guidelines that grow out of the gospel, start with your staff and the leaders of the ministries that are up front. Don’t start with everybody. Start working from the inside out so that there emerges a culture and a modeling from your worship leaders, from your staff who are in front, and from the leaders of the youth ministry, and so on.

Work with your leaders.

2) Deal with parents quietly and work toward common expectations for the young people. That is not easy, but it is a wise priority, instead of attacking things at the most painful point of the way the girls and boys are dressing. Come on, let’s get the parents on board here.

3) Cultivate the joyful sense that modesty is beautiful. Renounce any mindset that modest means frumpy. From my own experience — I am just testifying as a man now who has been a teenager and a 20-year-old and a 30-year-old and a 40-year-old and a 50-year-old and a 60-year old — I can testify without any doubt that at every age of my life, my masculine life, my hungry life: Sexy dressing of women is less attractive than modest beauty. Of course, it makes the eyes turn. It makes the eyes turn, but there is a world of difference between making men’s eyes turn with sexy dressing and being attractive as a beautiful or a handsome person.

[Used with permission from *Desiring God*, June, 2016]



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