

## THE LOOK AND BEHAVIOR OF LOVE

The cross has a special meaning for the Christian woman. It is a reminder of a love so great that it was willing to endure ridicule, humiliation, pain, and even death. The cross – hanging on her bedroom wall or on a chain around her neck – reminds a Christian woman of the totally unselfish love of Jesus. The “look” of Jesus’ love is one of humility. The “behavior” of Jesus’ love turns away from self to others.

Not long ago, I was with my husband and several male members of my family at a restaurant. The woman who served our table was wearing a cross necklace that hung deep between her partially-exposed breasts. When the men at my table looked (believe me, it was impossible not to), what do you suppose they saw? The cross... or something else?

The woman who served our table most probably had no intention of being a “temptress.” It is likely that she – like many of us – was so used to the casual, exposed look of today’s “comfortable with herself” woman that she didn’t find anything harmful about her choice of clothing. Perhaps no one ever explained to her how sin distorts a man’s visual appreciation of a woman’s body. Or, perhaps she did not understand the look and behavior of the cross and her responsibility to lead away from temptation. At that moment, the Christian men of my family were called to turn their eyes away from the woman and, instead, focus on the Cross of Jesus. To be a gentleman often means to avert attention from what is pleasing to the eye and re--focus on what is honorable.

The world’s look and behavior of love boldly screams: “Look at me!” Everywhere a modern woman turns she sees images that lead her toward selfish interests rather than the best interests of others. What is the message of Victoria’s Secret? It is one thing for a married woman to purchase something in the store that she will wear for her husband, but is that who Victoria’s Secret is targeting? Every time a woman walks through the check-out lane at the grocery store she is tempted to defy humility and become the object of attention. “Sensually seductive,” reads one magazine cover. “How to get him to be all about you,” reads another.

God’s look and behavior of love tenderly encourages: “Look at the Cross!” Every time we gaze upon the Cross we are reminded of Jesus’ look and behavior of love. His look turned toward others away from Himself. His behavior placed the well-being of others ahead of His own desires.

God’s Book of Love – the Bible -- explains the covering of love. After the first man and woman sinned, they were aware of a new emotion: shame. They were embarrassed by their nakedness.

- What did Adam and Eve do in Genesis 3:7?
- What did they do next (v. 8)?

Everything that we say, do, and wear is heard and seen by God. We are in the presence of God at all times. We cannot hide from Him.

- Did God agree with woman’s choice of “bikini” leaves? What did He do in v. 21? (According to the Hebrew definition, a garment [or coat] of skin literally meant covering from the neck to the knee.)

- Since God personally dressed Adam and Eve, what do you suppose He was asking them to remember?

Sin in the world affects our thinking and behavior. Clothing is God's way of reminding us of our sin. But, even more, it is His way of helping us to avoid sin, to be sorry for our sins, and to desire forgiveness of our sin through Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ did not come in Adam and Eve's lifetime. But, they were promised His salvation. Cast out of the perfect garden, they set about living in a sin-damaged world. There was no way back to Eden, but God did not leave His beloved creation to be exposed and defenseless against sin. He set man and woman on a course forward to the Cross. Trusting God, Adam and Eve were covered in another kind of clothing. So are we.

- What does Isaiah 61:10 tell us?
- What is the promise of 2 Timothy 2:21? How does this apply to the way we look and behave?

Jesus made us "holy" in God's eyes when He gave all He had on the Cross. Wrapped in Jesus' righteousness (holiness), we experience deliverance from sin. Because of Jesus, God sees us as clean and holy "vessels" for His good purpose.

- What is our body (1 Corinthians 6:19)?
- Why are we so valuable (v. 20)?
- Because of what Jesus has done for us, will we choose to be "sexy" or "holy" (1 Thessalonians 4:7)? Boastful or modest (1 Timothy 2:9-10)?

Changes take place in our lives when we trust God. His Spirit at work in us enables us to resist doing whatever "feels" good or right to us and, instead, do what is good and right before God. This makes a positive difference for others.

- What does 1 Timothy 4:12 tell us?
- If we glorify ourselves, how do you suppose we will be seen by others? How might this affect their thoughts and behavior?
- If we strive to look and behave in a way that glorifies God, how do you suppose we will be seen by others? How might this affect their thoughts and behavior?

Once again, we turn our eyes toward the Cross. All of God's Word – throughout Old and New Testaments – leads us to the greatest look and behavior of love ever known. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 describes God's kind of love, His agape love. Agape love has a profound effect on what we choose to say, how we choose to act, and even how we choose to dress.

- God's love is patient and kind. How does this motivate us to speak? Act? Dress?

- God's love does not envy or boast because it is not proud. How does this motivate us to speak? Act? Dress?
- God's love is not rude or self-seeking. How does this motivate us to speak? Act? Dress?
- God's love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. How does this motivate us to speak? Act? Dress?
- God's love always protects. How does this motivate us to speak? Act? Dress?
- God's love always trusts, hopes, and perseveres. When voices of the world tempt us to do what is "popular" or "fashionable," what courage and confidence can we find in being loved as a daughter of God through Christ?

God's love protects the body, heart, mind, and soul. In striving to glorify God in everything we do, including the way we dress, we are also striving to protect ourselves and others.

Did you just utter a deep sigh? Do you regret that your cross went unnoticed somewhere between exposed cleavage or your bikini leaves may have tempted a man to worship you instead of your Creator?

Even when we try to do what is right in God's eyes, we too often fail. Every day, our own sinful thoughts and actions remind us of how sinfully human we really are. The world offers no hope, only a "fix." When our look and behavior places us – and others – at risk of a broken relationship, sexually-transmitted disease, or unwed pregnancy, then the world sells a therapy, a pill or a procedure. But, eyes focused on the Cross, no matter the circumstance, see promise of healing and new life.

It may seem impossible to have the perfect look and behavior of Christ's love. But, with Jesus Christ, nothing is impossible. When He covers us with His look (holiness) and with His behavior (forgiveness), then we are changed! We don't have to speak, act, or dress like we used to. We can, instead, have a look and behavior that brings glory not to ourselves, but to the God who made us.

Eyes can be turned away from something else... to the Cross.

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