

REMINDER

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Modesty Revisited

by WENDY SHALIT

The following essay was excerpted from a speech delivered at Hillsdale College (www.hillsdale.edu)

“Many of the problems we hear about today - sexual harassment, date rape, young women who suffer from eating disorders and report feeling a lack of control over their bodies - are all connected, I believe, to our culture’s attack on modesty.”

This afternoon I was reading a magazine for brides in which a woman had submitted the following question: “My fiancé wants us to move in together, but I want to wait until we’re married. Am I doing our marriage an injustice?” The editor responded: “Your fiancé should understand why you want to wait to share a home. Maybe you’re concerned about losing your identity as an individual. Or maybe you’re concerned about space issues.”

Space issues? Losing her identity? If this woman cared about those things, she wouldn’t want to get married in the first place. Her question was a moral one. She wanted to know what would be best for her marriage. And on this - however unbeknownst to the magazine’s new-agey editor - the evidence is in: Couples who live together before marriage are much less likely to get married; and if they do marry, they’re more likely to get divorced. Yet the vocabulary of modesty has largely dropped from our cultural consciousness; when a woman asks a question that necessarily implicates it, we can only mumble about “space issues?”

I first became interested in the subject of modesty for a rather mundane reason - because I didn’t like the bathrooms at Williams College. Like many enlightened colleges and universities these days, Williams houses boys next to girls in its dormitories and then has the students vote by floor on whether their common bathrooms should be coed. It’s all very democratic, but the votes always seem to go in the coed direction because no one wants to be thought a prude. When I objected, I was told by my fellow students that I “must not be comfortable with [my] body.” Frankly, I didn’t get that, because I was fine with my body; it was their bodies in such close proximity to mine that I wasn’t thrilled about.

I ended up writing about this experience in *Commentary* as a kind of therapeutic exercise. But when my article was reprinted in *Reader’s Digest*, a weird thing happened: I got piles of letters from kids who said, “I thought I was the only one who couldn’t stand these bathrooms.” How could so many people feel they were the “only ones” who believed in privacy and modesty? It was troubling that they were afraid to speak up. When and why, I wondered, did modesty become such a taboo?

At Yale in 1997, a few years after my own coed bathroom protest, five Orthodox Jewish students petitioned the administration for permission to live off-campus instead of in coed dorms. In denying them, a dean with the Dickensian name of Brodhead explained that “Yale has its own rules and requirements, which we insist on because they embody our

(continued inside)

values and beliefs.” Yale has no core curriculum, of course, but these coed bathrooms, according to Dean Brodhead, embody its beliefs. I would submit that as a result of this kind of “liberationist” ideology, we today have less, not more freedom, than in the pre-1960’s era when modesty was upheld as a virtue. In this regard it’s important to recall that when colleges had separate dorms for men and women, and all the visitation rules that went with them, it was also possible for kids to circumvent those rules. It was possible, for instance - now, I’m not advocating this- for students to sneak into each others’ dorms and act immodestly. But in the new culture of “liberation,” a student can’t sneak into the dorms and be modest, or, more accurately, she can’t sneak out. There is no “right of exit” in today’s immodest society. If you don’t participate, you’re a weirdo. Hence students are not really free to develop their best selves, to act in accordance with their hopes.

Modesty’s Loss, Social Pathology’s Gain

Many of the problems we hear about today - sexual harassment, date rape, young women who suffer from eating disorders and report feeling a lack of control over their bodies - are all connected, I believe, to our culture’s attack on modesty. Listen, first, to the words we use to describe intimacy: what once was called “making love” and then “having sex?” is now “hooking up” - like airplanes refueling in flight.

Since the 1960’s...men have grown to expect women to be casual about sex, and women for their part don’t feel they have the right to say “no.” This has brought us all more misery than joy. On MTV I have seen a 27-year-old woman say she was “sort of glad” that she had herpes, because now she has “an excuse to say ‘no’ to sex?” For her, disease had replaced modesty as the justification for exercising free choice.

In 1948 there was a song called “*Baby It’s Cold Outside*” by Frank Loesser, in which a boyfriend wants his girlfriend to sleep over. His argument is simple but compelling: Baby it’s cold outside, and if she doesn’t sleep over, she could catch pneumonia and die, and that would cause him “lifelong sorrow.” In response, the girl offers several counter-arguments: “My father will be waiting at the door, there’s bound to be talk tomorrow,” etc.

The counterpoint to “*Baby It’s Cold Outside*” is a story I read in a women’s magazine, written by an ex-boyfriend of an 18-year-old girl whose father had decided that she was too old to be a virgin. After commiserating with the boyfriend, this father drove the pair to a hotel (he didn’t trust the boyfriend with his car), where the girl became hysterical and the scheme fell apart. This article was called “*My ExGirlfriend’s Father: What a Man!*” And although the story isn’t typical, it is quite common these days for parents to rent hotel rooms for their kids on prom nights, which is essentially the same principle. So the father in “*Baby It’s Cold*

Outside” waiting at the door, and the older culture that supported modesty, actually made women stronger. It gave them the right to say “no” until they met someone they wanted to marry. Today’s culture of “liberation” gives women no ground on which to stand.

When I talk to college students, invariably one will say, “Well, if you want to be modest, be modest. If you want to be promiscuous, be promiscuous. We all have a choice, and that’s the wonderful thing about this society.” But the culture, I tell them, can’t be neutral. Nor is it subtle in its influence on behavior. In fact, culture works more like a Sherman tank. In the end, if it’s not going to value modesty, it will value promiscuity and adultery; and all our lives and marriages will suffer as a result.

Four Myths Exposed

A first step toward reviving respect for modesty in our culture is to strike at the myths that undermine it. Let me touch on four of these.

The first myth is that modesty is Victorian. But what about the story of Rebecca and Isaac? When Rebecca sees Isaac and covers herself, it is not because she is trying to be Victorian. Her modesty was the key to what would bring them together and develop a profound intimacy. When we cover up what is external or superficial - what we all share in common - we send a message that what is most important are our singular hearts and minds. This separates us from the animals, and always did, long before the Victorian era.

The second myth about modesty is that it’s synonymous with prudery. This was the point of the dreadful movie *Pleasantville*, the premise of which was that nobody in the 1950’s had fun or experienced love. It begins in black and white and turns to color only when the kids enlighten their parents about sex. In truth, modesty is nearly the opposite of prudery. Paradoxically, prudish people have more in common with the promiscuous. The prudish and the promiscuous share a disposition against allowing themselves to be moved by others, or to fall in love. Modesty, on the other hand, invites and protects the evocation of real love. It is erotic, not neurotic.

To illustrate this point, I like to compare photographs taken at Coney Island almost a century ago with photographs from nude beaches in the 1970’s. At Coney Island, the beach-goers are completely covered up, but the men and women are stealing glances at one another and seem to be having a great time. On the nude beaches, in contrast, men and women hardly look at each other - rather, they look at the sky. They appear completely bored.

The third myth is that modesty isn’t natural. This myth has a long intellectual history, going back at least to David Hume, who argued that society invented modesty so that men could be sure that children were their own. As Rousseau pointed out, this argument that modesty is a social construct suggests that it is

possible to get rid of modesty altogether. Today we try to do just that, and it is widely assumed that we are succeeding. But are we?

In arguing that Hume was wrong and that modesty is rooted in nature, a recently discovered hormone called oxytocin comes to mind. This hormone creates a bonding response when a mother is nursing her child, but is also released during intimacy. Here is physical evidence that women become emotionally bonded to their sexual partners even if they only intend a more casual encounter. Modesty protected this natural emotional vulnerability; it made women strong.

The fourth and final myth I want to touch on is that *modesty is solely a concern for women*. We are where we are today only in part because the feminine ideal has changed. The masculine ideal has followed suit. It was once looked on as manly to be faithful to one woman for life, and to be protective toward all women. Sadly, this is no longer the case, even among many men to whom modest women might otherwise look as kindred spirits. Modern feminists are wrong to expect men to be gentlemen when they themselves are not ladies, but men who value “scoring” and then lament that there are no modest women around anymore – well, they are just as bad.

Restoring A Modest Society

I was fascinated in my research to discover how many secular women are returning to modesty because they found, simply as a practical matter, that immodesty wasn't working for them. In short, they weren't successful finding the right men. For me this prompts an essentially religious question: Why were we created in this way? Why can't we become happy by imitating the animals? In the sixth chapter of Isaiah we read that the fiery angels surrounding the throne of God have six wings. One set is for covering the face, another for covering the legs, and only the third is for flying. Four of the six wings, then, are for modesty's sake. This beautiful image suggests that the more precious something is, the more it must conceal and protect itself. The message of our dominant culture today, I'm afraid, is that we're not precious, that we weren't created in the divine image. I'm saying to the contrary that we were, and that as such we deserve modesty.

Wendy Shalit's essays have appeared in The Wall Street Journal, *Commentary*, *City Journal* and other publications. Her book, *A Return to Modesty*, was published by The Free Press in 1999, and last year was reissued in paperback by Simon & Schuster's Touchstone Books.

COMING JULY 16 & 17!

Bluegrass Gospel Music

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of
Collinsville, Texas

HAROLD CAMPING SAYS HE WAS RIGHT

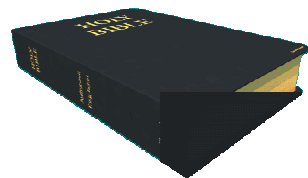


In responding to the question of why judgment day didn't come on May 21 as he predicted, Harold Camping says that it did come! Speaking live on his Family Radio broadcast on May 23, Camping said, “God brought Judgment Day to the whole world. It will continue to Oct 21, 2011, and at that time the whole world will be destroyed.” He claims that his previous predictions were correct, as well, because they were fulfilled “spiritually.” On May 21, 1988, judgment came upon the churches, and on Sept. 7, 1994, judgment continued on the churches.

Camping and the Global Warming prognosticators have the same win-win formula. No matter what happens, they are right! It reminds us of what the late religious quack “Reverend Ike” used to say, “You can't lose with the stuff I use.” No doubt, when October 22 rolls around, Camping will say, “The whole world was destroyed yesterday!”

The Camping fiasco is reminiscent of the date-setting fervor of William Miller in the 19th century. When his date of 1843 proved wrong, he changed the date to October 1844. Tens of thousands followed Miller's predictions, and many diverse, unscriptural “adventist” groups sprang up within this excited religious atmosphere. After October 1844 passed uneventfully, Ellen Harmon said she had a vision in which she learned that Jesus' return then was not to earth but to the heavenly holy of holies to begin investigating the records of human works. Ellen married James White and they founded the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which is still with us today with its many heresies (such as Investigative Judgment) taught by a deluded female prophetess.

The normal-literal interpretation of prophecy is the protection from wild-eyed allegorical exegesis, and this method of interpretation teaches us that the Rapture of New Testament saints is imminent, judgment of the world will follow, and all of the mocking of unbelievers will not stop it. ***“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (II Peter 3:9-10).***



NURSERY MINISTRY WORKERS FOR THIS WEEK

10:50 a.m. Service ----- Cradle Roll 1: Caryn Quinnelly
 Cradle Roll 2: Derek Quinnelly
 Lord's Supper Service ----- Cradle Roll 1: Bertha Segebarrt
 Cradle Roll 2: Janet Bridges
 Wed. Evening Service ----- Cradle Roll 1: Charity Crawford
 Cradle Roll 2: LeAnna White

AND THE PEOPLE CAME...

Week of May 29, 2011

Sunday School ----- 18
 Sunday Morning Service ----- 47
 Sunday Evening Service ----- 36
 Wed. Evening, 06/01/11 Service ----- 27

AND THE PEOPLE GAVE...

Week of May 29, 2010

Undesignated Tithes & Offerings ----- \$ 1,003.64
 Insurance Fund ----- \$ 121.95
Total Received for Week of 05/29/11: \$ 1,125.59

**Average amount of Undesignated Offerings needed
 to operate the church EACH WEEK,
 as a minimum = \$ 1,400.00**

INSURANCE FUND REPORT FOR MAY:

Monthly Requirement ----- \$ 273.08
 Amount Received during May, 2011 ----- \$ 148.95
Amount Short For May, 2011: - \$ 124.13

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WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SAVED

1. **Admit that you are a sinner.**
2. **Admit that God says all sins must be paid for.**
3. **Accept the fact that Christ took upon Himself the suffering necessary to pay for all your sins.**
4. **You must change your mind about sin and sinning (God calls this repentance).**
5. **By an act of your will, accept by faith the Lord Jesus Christ, who can save you from the penalty of sin. Then, tell God about this in a simple prayer. Believe that God keeps His promise to save you, and thank Him for His salvation.**

Please Remember To Be Faithful to Give!



As with everything else, the costs of keeping a church going never go down - they always go **up**. Bills wait for no one, and churches are no exception to this. An extra, sacrificial gift today by everyone present would go a long way...

We encourage all of our membership to practice obedience to God by being faithful every payday to give back to Him His tithe (10%). *If every family in our church would practice this one simple discipline, we would never have weeks where we have to put off paying some bills until the following week!*

Everything is expensive, especially for a small church like ours, but ours is a BIG God, and He LOVES to bless His children when they are obedient to Him!

If you are already a tither, we thank you, and encourage you to also give offerings as well. If you're currently not tithing, won't you please start **today - OK?** Thank you.

Church Directory

Todd W. White ----- Pastor
 Mickie Shatwell ----- Pianist
 Dickie Eberle ----- Greeter, Custodian
 Larry Mathews, Caryn Quinnelly, Todd W. White ----- S.S. Teachers
 Larry & Mary Byars, Brian & Charity Crawford,
 Dwayne English, Lou & Vicki Martin ----- Outreach
 Flowers ----- Hannah and Shirley White