

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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The World's Squeeze

Recently on *Gateway to Joy* I gave some talks on the subject of modesty. I expected negative letters. I had none. I received instead a flood of very favorable ones, including several from men who are as appalled as many of us women are at the way *Christian* women dress, not only on the beach or in the backyard but in church. Here are excerpts from one man's letter:

"I'm especially burdened about the almost total lack, it would seem, of recognition among Christian women—evangelical, Bible-taught (up to a point) women—of the concept of modesty and femininity in dress and deportment. My sisters of the Mennonite and Holiness persuasions are notable exceptions to the glaring lack of awareness among most other Christian ladies. I almost hate to see hot weather come again—for I shall see a rush among both men and women to see how many clothes they can take off and get by. I understand that women's different thought patterns may allow them to view the 60-75 percent exposure of male skin in a bathing suit without any arousal problems. At least they try to tell me that.

"I can't argue with them, but I can state my reaction. The sight of a reasonably shapely woman in a form-fitting suit which leaves almost nothing to the imagination is not good for the man who knows he should not lust after the body of another besides his wife. Sometimes, if the point is raised, a woman will sharply respond, 'You just have a dirty mind!' or, 'Well, you don't *have* to look!'

"I suppose there is only one answer for a Christian man—stay away from those places. But there is a year-round problem. The women today have taken over the wearing of pants. That all-too-customary apparel, with its lack of femininity in every respect in my judgment, has resulted in a careless, sloppy, 'don't-give-a-hoot' attitude in sprawling posture on a chair or couch, legs spread in every direction except straightforward. Most females, while wearing a dress (rare occasions for most), still retain sufficient modesty to sit like a lady, or, if wearing an all-too-short skirt, squirm and tug, going through ridiculous motions trying to cover that which

should not have been exposed to start with. A judge in Michigan suggested that the dress, or lack of it, of a certain woman was the cause of her being raped. No, I won't be that foolish, but I definitely feel that a Christian woman needs to be aware that she *owes* it to men to consider that she is guilty (not consciously, perhaps) of causing men to sin by her dress. Have you addressed this issue in print?"

I am not sure that I have, but I have been observing it with deepening dismay for years, deploring not only the frankly sexy and provocative outfits but also the thoughtlessness, even what appears to me to be a defiant and calculated sloppiness, which characterizes so many women (and men too). Look at the high-fashion magazines. One is confronted with page after page of sullen, insolent, contemptuous faces and slouching figures wearing clothes which appear to have been thrown on—or mostly off.

What ever happened to plain old-fashioned neatness? Simple prettiness? When I was a girl a thousand years ago we did our best to look at least neat and possibly a little bit pretty even if we knew our faces and hairdos weren't all we'd have liked them to be.

And then there is the unisex look. I was a bit taken aback recently at a conference when the three women who provided the music came onto the platform wearing slacks. Very likely the dear ladies had never been given reason to question such a choice, but I am an older woman, required by God's Word (Titus 2:3-5) to teach the younger. May I suggest that we ought to think seriously about what it means to be *women*,* women of God, aiming more at clothing which is *distinctly* feminine, at least in public? There are occasions, of course, when trousers are appropriate—horseback riding, mountain climbing, walking in bitter cold weather, gardening, or painting the porch ceiling. But please, give the men (and the rest of us) a break, ladies. Wear skirts more often than pants!

"You mean we've got to dress *up* all the time?" they ask. No, certainly not always "up," but how about a skirt—even denim or khaki if you like, with a crisp blouse instead of the ubiquitous and far from appealing

* See my book, *Let Me Be a Woman*, a paperback available from us at 10 Strawberry Cove, Magnolia, MA 01930. \$5.00 postpaid.

T-shirts and—worse and worse—*sweats!* Have mercy on the poor people who have to look at you!

Yet there is hope. A lovely group of seven girls from nearby Gordon College came to my house for tea recently. I was delighted to see how feminine they all were in both manner and dress. Although they were strangers I supposed they had made a special effort just for me. No, they assured me, they usually wear dresses or skirts, *even on campus!* “Do you get flak?” I asked. They smiled. “Yes, sometimes, but we don’t mind.” We spent a delightful hour talking about womanliness, courtesy, and the fact that one’s appearance, manner, and tone of voice reveal something about respect for others—and, most importantly I think, they are visible signs of an invisible reality. They show us something deeper, something about the heart. We know that only God can look fully at one’s heart. Man looks on the outward appearance—it’s the only thing he can look at. What sort of message does he read?

“The women should be dressed quietly, and their demeanor should be modest and serious. The adornment of a Christian woman is not a matter of an elaborate coiffure, expensive clothes or valuable jewelry, but the living of a good life” (1 Tim. 2:9, 10, PHILLIPS).

May I issue an earnest plea to both men and women to give serious thought to how we affect others by our manner of dress, whether it is a matter of truly Christian modesty and decency, or simply an earnest effort to look cleaner, neater, and *unmistakably* manly or womanly?

Another aspect is worth thoughtful consideration: should we aim to be always in the vanguard of fashion so as to draw attention to ourselves? Or—the other extreme—draw attention by allowing ourselves to become frumpy because we think we should not care about such worldly things as dress?

“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves toward the goal of true maturity” (Rom. 12:2, PHILLIPS).

Clay Pots

The Indians of Ecuador make clay pots of very simple design with no ornamentation or glaze. The women challenged me to try shaping them as they did, rolling “snakes” of wet clay and then coiling them round and round until they had a perfectly smooth and balanced vessel. It looked rather easy so I decided to have a go at it. Alas. I found that it was a highly developed skill. Clearly mine was not a master hand. My attempts to imitate it provided hilarious entertainment for my jungle friends, as

did just about everything else I tried.

The next step was to build a very hot fire of thorns and brushwood and bake the pot. It was then ready for use, to carry water from the river or to cook in. Nobody gave two hoots about the pots themselves. They were all made of the same old clay from the same old river. What mattered was what was inside.

The apostle Paul likens us to mere clay pots (2 Cor. 4:7). The Potter has formed us, shaped us into a useful vessel, put us through the fires of testing that we might be fit to hold a priceless treasure: “The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (v. 6, NIV).

Many a night found me sitting in my hammock by the fire, pondering those words after everyone had long since gone to sleep. What spiritual treasures God had given me, from my earliest memory, and here I was, charged with the task of sharing them somehow with my neighbors. To the Indians I was merely a freak, a foreigner, and a liability. I couldn’t even manage to make a pot, and they had no idea that I actually *was* one—a pot made of common human clay, holding a treasure of which they as yet knew nothing. Never did a missionary feel more useless and helpless than did I in those days as I struggled desperately with the unwritten Auca language. What was I doing here? How strange were the ways of God!

I can think of no clearer analogy of our place in God’s service, and no more accurate picture of the *relative* merits of who we are and what we have to offer. We shall always be common clay pots, “to show that this all-surpassing power is from God *and not from us.*” May we never forget that.

Love, Paul said in another passage (1 Cor. 13:7, PHILLIPS), “is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.”

Prayer

Grant unto us, Almighty God, of Thy good Spirit, that quiet heart, and that patient lowliness to which Thy comforting Spirit comes; that we, being humble toward Thee, and loving toward one another, may have our hearts pre-

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pared for that peace of Thine which passeth understanding; which if we have, the storms of life can hurt us but little, and the cares of life vex us not at all; in presence of which death shall lose its sting, and the grave its terror; and we, in calm joy, walk all the days of our appointed time, until our great change shall come. Amen.

George Dawson, 1821-1876

The Father's Voice

Norbert Selking, of Hebron, Illinois, who writes to me and prays for me, wrote, "I am reminded of our young family as they were growing up. As a farmer working out in the fields of my dad's Indiana farm, quite often I would be out all day cultivating the corn or taking care of new litters of pigs. Then there would be those evenings I'd come into the house and my wife would tell me that the children had been particularly cantankerous, fussing and fuming all day. She had tried everything to quiet those little ones. Then, under some special inspiration, I would scoop up one of these little ones and would hum the "Missouri Waltz" while dancing at the same time. Was it the melody that would quiet them? No, I'm not that good a singer. Was it the steps of the waltz that would quiet them? No, though the waltz is my favorite dance. No, it was the voice of their father that would cause these children to relax and become still.

"My prayers for you and others are like that, Elisabeth. With simplicity of heart we too may allow ourselves to be gathered up into the arms of the Heavenly Father, and let Him sing His love song over us. I believe for this reason the book of Psalms has become such a vital part of my daily devotions."

The Husband's Love

Bob Urban and his wife, of Moscow, Tennessee, have taken in a number of foster children. "Our first experience was a sibling group of three: a sixteen-month-old girl, a four-year-old boy, and a five-year-old girl. Talk about when the rubber hits the road! They stayed with us for five weeks until they were reunited with their parents. We currently have a seventeen-year-old girl staying with us through foster care. She is five and a half months pregnant.

"I share this with you not to gain praise, but to glorify our Lord and remember that whatever we do for the least of these, we do unto Him. It is surprising how many friends and neighbors think that these children are a waste of time. I see this as a sad reflection of our soci-

ety. With each of the children that my wife and I care for, my attitude should be one of adoption, just as Christ has adopted us into His family. If I am to be the head of our house, then I must try to be a good shepherd. The good shepherd must lay his life down for his sheep, not with money or things but with availability.

"My wife is second in my life, but she does not mind that I consider Christ as first. This doesn't mean that I live a sinless life, but I strive on toward the goal and continue to seek where I am in relation to the Lord. A new chapter in our life is beginning. We are being blessed with our first child after three years of trying. My wife is nine weeks along and doing well other than being sick all day and night. Being a man I thought she'd like to be reminded of the verse about having joy all the time. It has somewhat lost its appeal for her, but I was able to get a smile while she was leaning over the toilet!

"When she is feeling poor, I must be able to fill in for her. Whether it be cooking a meal, doing laundry, cleaning the bathroom, or whatever she may need done. With the Lord as my helper, I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. For when I am weak, He is strong. I am thankful to have these opportunities that the Lord has provided me, and remember to call on the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension. I hope and pray the Lord will make me the man He wants me to be. Having many shortcomings, I must not imitate what is evil, but what is good. And one day I may have no greater joy than to hear of my children walking in truth."

Does a Falling Tree Make Noise?

We have all heard it said that unless there is an ear to hear it, a tree falling in the forest makes no noise. Quantum mechanics tells us there is no tree at all until someone *sees* it. The following verses were once circulated at Balliol College, Oxford:

There was a young man who said, "God,
Now doesn't it seem to you odd
That this great chestnut tree
Simply ceases to be
When there's no one about in the quad?"
"It really is not at all odd,
I'm *always* about in the quad.
And the great chestnut tree
Never ceases to be
In the mind of yours faithfully, God."

Note from Lars

Letters from you kind readers continue to come in. As I've said before, we appreciate them but it's impossible for Elisabeth to answer all of them so I pitch in with a few. Every now and then I get one I'd love to answer, but the fellow doesn't have a last name. His first name is Anonymous and doubly frustrating is that he doesn't include his address. Generally Anonymous' letter is not a favorable review of some article in this newsletter. I try to answer every unfavorable letter so that at least the writer knows we have read and will ponder it. I'm sure Anonymous feels bad, but if in the future you want to take on the handle of Anonymous, please send your address along with it.

Recommended Reading

It's a Lifestyle, by Nathaniel and Andrew Ryun, two courageous men who take a clear stand for sexual purity. "Dating only weakens the spiritual growth and foundation of the Church. By taking young people's eyes off Christ and putting them on the opposite sex, the Church has encouraged another god before the one true God." Alternatives to dating? Read the book! Published by Jim Ryun Ministries, 16718 Thirteenth St., Lawrence, KS 66044, phone/fax (913)749-3325. Price: \$8.50 postpaid.

Book on Tape by Elisabeth Elliot

The book *These Strange Ashes* has been out of print for several years, but you can listen to my reading of the story—my first year as a jungle missionary, 1952-53—when, through four stunning blows, I learned a bit more of God's unsearchable riches. Order from Lars Gren (**not from the Newsletter**), 10 Strawberry Cove, Magnolia, MA 01930, \$9.00 postpaid.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule August-October 1997

August 24-30 Bermuda, Willowbank, (809)234-1616, Fax (809)234-3373.

September 6 Milwaukee, VCY America Inc., Jim Schneider, (414)935-3000; (800)729-9829.

September 13 Naples, Maine, Cornerstone Gospel Church, Myra Marstaller (207)693-6102.

September 23 Dallas, First Baptist Church banquet.

October 1 San Diego, North American Baptist Women's Union, phone/fax (703)893-2710.

October 4 Hermosa Beach, Calif., Hope Chapel, Vicky Ramirez, (310)374-4673.

October 10 Danvers, Mass. National Christian Home Education Leadership Conference, Michael Farris, (540)338-7600.

October 16 Albany, Ga., First Baptist Church, (912) 883-8000.

October 17, 18 Shreveport, La., First Assembly of God, Wade DeForest, (318) 686-8376 or (318) 688-4825 (home).

October 31 Gaithersburg, Md., Covenant Life Church, Carolyn Mahaney, (301)869-2800.

Keep in Touch

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