



Modesty for Messianics

being your brother's keeper

by Tim Kelley

My earliest recollection of church was when I was about 6 years old - getting dressed in my white shirt, tie, slacks, and freshly shined shoes, then jumping in the station wagon with my mom and dad along with my five siblings as we headed off to the local Church of Christ. That was back in 1961. Church then was much different for me than what it became just a few years later. The one point that stood out was the fact that everyone called the men 'brother'. "Hello Brother Smith" and "Good day Brother Brock" were a couple of the greetings that stand out in my mind. Of course "Good to see you, Brother Gannon" would always turn my head. You see, Brother Gannon was my uncle, and a deacon in the church, so if Brother Gannon was near, it meant I had to behave or he'd get on me - or at least tell my mom. Then, of course, there was Brother North. He was the preacher. I can still remember him. Sometimes he'd visit our Sunday school class. Whenever he spoke to us, we were just Tim or John or Steve . . . never 'brother Tim'.

I couldn't really figure out why all the men were called 'brother'. I figured it was just a Church of Christ thing because when my dad went off in another direction, we found ourselves in a Sabbath keeping group and nobody called anyone 'brother'. Instead of brother, we were all collectively called 'brethren'. "Brethren, please remain standing for the opening prayer", or "Brethren - I'm here to tell you . . ." . "Why is everyone called brethren?" I would ask myself, so one day I got the dictionary out and looked it up. What did I find? It means *brother!* "Why not just call everyone 'brother' like in the Church of Christ?" I'd say to myself, but, as time went on I came to understand that 'brethren' meant the collective body of the church, including women and children.

Many years have come and gone since I had those thoughts, but for the past 10 or so years, the thought of each of us in this Hebraic walk being a brother has weighed on me, but not in the same way as before. Now I look at the term 'brother' with the idea that we are called to be our 'brother's keeper'. Since becoming an active part of the Hebrew roots movement I've noticed a marked difference in our desire to help another person's walk with God than what I had been accustomed to, and I believe I understand why. Those of us in the Hebraic, or 'Jewish roots' movement, are pretty much in, well . . . rebellion. We're rebelling against our former church, or what we've been taught, or a heavy handed pastor . . . It doesn't really matter - we're just rebelling. So, since I'm rebelling, and you're rebelling, who am I to tell you that your walk with Messiah is not correct . . . or that you could improve this or that.

Well BRETHREN . . . maybe it's time we start looking at our brother and doing what we can to help him with his walk, or at least, stop throwing stumbling-blocks in his path. "How" you might ask, "could I be causing my brother to stumble?" There are many ways, but the stumbling-block I want to address is that of immodesty.

Before getting into the subject of modesty, let's look at what scripture has to say about being our brother's keeper. We all know that Cain asked, in a somewhat sarcastic way, if he was supposed to be his brother's keeper.

^{NKJ} **Genesis 4:9** Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"¹

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Though God did not directly answer the question, His answer is evident. “Yes Cain, you ARE your brother’s keeper. The Torah, in fact the entire Bible, is replete with scriptures that show we are to be watching out for our brother. For instance, we all know that if we find one of our brother’s livestock after it has wandered off the farm, we should bring it back to him.

ESV Deuteronomy 22:1 "You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray and ignore them. You shall take them back to your brother."

This is considered common courtesy. We would at least expect a phone call if one of our animals is found off the farm. To not do so would be considered negligent even today. What about helping the poor? Yes – we clearly understand that we are to help the poor among us.

ESV Deuteronomy 15:7 "If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother . . . "

Helping our brother, either by loaning him money or providing him work, was what God expected of the Israelite people. What about our involvement with our brother in ‘spiritual’ matters? In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he showed that we should be engaged in our brother’s spiritual life

ESV Philippians 2:4 “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others . . . ”

The context shows that Paul’s concern was for their spiritual welfare. In another place he taught that it was sometimes needful to avoid doing certain things that were lawful (within the Torah) in order to help the spiritual walk of your brother. In the case of eating meat offered to idols, he said:

ESV 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."

Thus the scriptures make it clear that we are our brother’s keeper and that in some cases we may need to avoid doing certain things in order to help the spiritual walk of our brother. So, with that understanding, let’s look at the topic of modesty.

Modesty is a broad subject. It pertains to our conduct, our speech, our income (“we enjoy a modest income”), how we conduct ourselves with a person of the opposite sex, and of course – how we dress.

Some people consider modesty a relative subject, and indeed it can be if, for instance, you’re comparing the incomes of movie stars to sports figures (“I made over \$15 million on that last movie”, says the movie star. “That’s impressive”, says the basketball player, “I only made a modest \$10 million this entire season”.) In regards to modest dress, it’s not quite that simple. We may think that an Amish woman dresses modestly here in America, but when compared to a woman in Saudi Arabia, she would be considered immodestly dressed. That may be the case, but does that mean that a woman wearing a bikini is more modest than a woman wearing a g-string? I was once told by a church-going man that Americans get too ‘hung up’ about modesty. “Modesty is cultural” he said. He went on to explain that he had once visited the French Riviera and that it was the custom to walk the beach totally nude. “You don’t have any modesty issues there”, he said. “Everyone’s dressed (or undressed) the same!”. I asked him “if that’s the case, would you send your 16 year old son there for spring break?”

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No, true modesty in dress is not relative and it's not cultural. Why? Because God, not culture, sets the standard for modesty. Thus, I want to spend the rest of this article discussing modesty within the Hebraic walk and our responsibility to our brother in regards to how we dress.

The Bible says little about modesty in regards to how a person dresses, but instead focuses on the intent of one's heart. In Judaism, modesty is considered a character trait closely associated with humility, both of which are identified with the term *Tznuut*,² a form of the Hebrew word *tsana*. We find *tsana* in a number of passages dealing with humility:

ESV Proverbs 11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.

In this passage, the Hebrew word for *humble* is *tsana* (pronounced 'tsaw-nah' - Strong's # 6800). Throughout this proverb, Solomon contrasts good character traits with bad traits. In this verse, he's saying that a person who presents himself in a prideful manner will fall in disgrace, but a person who walks modestly (with humility) has wisdom. Thus you could say that the opposite of pride is *tsana* – modesty. *Tsana* is found in another form in this passage –

ESV Micah 6:8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly (*tsana*) with your God?

What does it mean to *walk humbly with your God*? Notice that Micah is not simply saying that we are to *walk* with God. Instead he adds that we are to *walk humbly* with God.

The Hebrew word for *walk* is *yalak* (pronounced 'yaw-lak' – Strong's #3212) and is akin to the word *halak* (pronounced 'haw-lak' – Strong's #1980) which also means *walk*. The first place we see the word *halak* is in regards to Enoch –

ESV Genesis 5:22 Enoch *walked* with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters.

It's assumed that Enoch's walk was pleasing to God since he is listed as a man of faith in the book of Hebrews.³ We can also note that Enoch's walk included warning others to turn to YHVH's ways.⁴ Thus, Enoch's walk was a walk of faith and righteousness. Since *to walk with God* would imply walking in faith and righteousness and since modesty is the opposite of pride, we can characterize a modest walk as one where a person is walking in God's ways, but does so without exhibiting pride. Thus, an immodest walk can be one where a person is walking in faith and righteousness, yet exhibiting pride. Messiah Yeshua pointed out an example of such to His disciples.

ESV Matthew 6:5 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, **that they may be seen by others**. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward."

Notice Yeshua's words. He's saying that even though prayer is an expected activity, when done with the intent of drawing attention to oneself, it does not represent a humble walk with God. Thus, to walk humbly before God is to do so in such a manner as to not draw attention to oneself.

Matthew records another example of immodest behavior –

ESV Matthew 23:5 "They (the scribes and Pharisees) do all their deeds **to be seen by others**. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long . . ."

² <http://www.davening.net/tznius.html>

³ Hebrews 11:5

⁴ Jude 1:14-15

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Wearing phylacteries was part of first century Jewish prayer life. These little boxes which carried specific passages from the Torah were bound to the worshipper's left arm and forehead during the times of prayer.⁵ In addition, YHVH commanded the Israelites to attach fringes to the corners of their garments as a continual reminder of the Torah instructions. Wearing garments with tassels and wearing phylacteries would imply that a person was walking in YHVH's commandments, and was perfectly fine as long as you didn't enlarge them to make them more visible; but Yeshua showed that dressing this way with the intent of bring attention to oneself is not consistent with the admonition to walk humbly with God. He apparently considered it to be extreme and immodest dress.

Besides the obvious matter of pride that one exhibits, there are other problems that can arise from extreme or immodest dress. If you continue reading Yeshua's admonition to His disciples in Matthew 23, you'll find that the motive behind the extreme dress and actions of the scribes and Pharisees was to garner a following –

^{ESV} **Matthew 23:6-7** “and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces **and being called rabbi by others** . . .”

It's easy to fall into a trap when you see someone who really looks religious. Oftentimes, people are swooned into believing a person is a great Bible scholar simply by the way he looks. As we've often heard “looks are deceiving”, but unfortunately our eyes lead us astray more than any of our other senses. Studies show that in many cases a good looking politician will win an election against a less appealing person even though their policies are much the same. In everyday life, our eyes can fall on a slick looking preacher, thinking he's a man of God, and be led down a spiritual path of destruction, or a man can notice an immodestly dressed woman and fall into the trap of lust and seduction.

So let's go back to the concept of being *our brother's keeper*. Are we being modest around our brother? Does our dress reflect a desire to avoid drawing attention to ourselves? Are we doing what we can do to keep our brother from sinning when he looks at us? I'm sure most of us would answer “why certainly”, and if you're a woman, you'd probably add “and even if I'm not, he shouldn't be looking!” The trouble is . . . people are looking, and if we know they're looking, don't we have an obligation to help our brother?

Much has been written about what constitutes appropriate dress for women so I don't want to rehash what's already out there in books, magazines, and on the Internet. What's important to me is that we understand that as people of God, we have a responsibility to our brother to help him or her in their walk, and if that means modifying the way we dress, then so be it.

Facts are facts. Men are the way they are because God made them that way. God made men to where they are stimulated by what they see, and the most beautiful thing to a man is a woman. When it comes beauty, women rate higher than cars, guns, horses, tools, mountains and everything else. In addition, there are certain parts of a woman's body that stimulate a man's eyes more than other parts. For any woman other than his wife, God intended for a man to see only a woman's head and face. Everything else was to be covered. That's why when Adam sinned, God replaced the skimpy fig leaf loin cloths he and Eve had sewn together with coats of skin that covered their bodies.⁶ Thus, it's certainly fine for a man to look at a woman's face, but he must resist the urge to look with lust.

⁵ The use of phylacteries is a literal understanding of the Deuteronomy 6:8. The Jewish leaders believed they should literally bind fragments of the scripture on their arm and forehead. An alternate understanding is that a follower of YHVH should apply the Torah in everything they think and everything they do.

⁶ Genesis 3:21

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^{ESV} **Matthew 5:28** But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Knowing the way God made men (and boys), would it not be appropriate then for Hebraic-minded women to limit the opportunity for lust by willingly adopting appropriate dress? But inappropriate dress for women is not the only area of modesty where we might cause our brother to stumble. Let me share some examples.

For the past 13 years my wife and I have been able to visit a number of Hebraic fellowships, attend a number of Hebrew roots conferences, host numerous seminars, and organize a Hebraic modeled Feast of Tabernacles site. While at these meetings I observe the way, and hear comments about the way some of the people dress . . . and it's clear they are concerned, or in the least, distracted by what they see. What's happening to our movement? It seems that when we left the church, we left our understanding of what's proper and appropriate dress in the church's pew. Granted – I haven't attended a traditional Christian church in more than 30 years, but I really doubt you'd find men and women in the pews dressed the same as we find some folks who attend Sabbath fellowships, the festivals, or a Hebrew/Jewish roots convention.

It's interesting. Many of those who leave traditional Christianity and begin to worship Yeshua (Jesus) in a more Hebraic way, tend to take on a number of Jewish traditions. They hang up their coat and tie, head for the Judaica shop or 'Jerusalem Market Place' and stock up on traditional Jewish attire – tzit-tzit (though not necessarily a tradition), prayer shawls, tallit, tallit katon, kippah, and the like; yet they fail to adopt any semblance of the standard of modesty defined in the volumes of Jewish writings. At the end of the week, they take off the 'nice' clothes they wear to work (many employers have some kind of dress code), set the Sabbath apart (make it holy) with candles and prayer then put on their 'holey' jeans to attend Sabbath services.

You might say "it doesn't make any difference what I wear", but it does! If the way you dress is distracting to another, you may be inhibiting that person's worship, and by so doing, you are not being your brother's keeper.

As mentioned earlier, I've observed a number of examples of people (including myself) who have been distracted by what another has worn at various Hebrew roots events. Here's a short list of some of those distractions:

- *Men with shirt tails hanging out* – OK, we're going to start with the 'minor' things, and yes, I'm old fashioned. I've been told that this is what's chic today, and I guess that's true since I recently attended a seminar where the host presented his message dressed in ragged jeans and with his shirt tail hanging out. Is this appropriate dress for a Torah study or Sabbath worship service? After all, I can remember when my friends in high school got sent home for refusing to tuck their shirts in!
- *Men with long hair* – How can a man claim to be a follower of Messiah Yeshua when both the Torah (Deut. 22:5) and the Apostolic Scriptures (1 Corinthians 11:14) teach that the Hebrew people were to maintain a clear distinction between the appearance of the sexes.
- *Men or women without shoes* – I was once told by a barefoot man that the ancient Hebrews did not wear shoes, so that's why he didn't. If that's the case, someone forgot to tell Moses (Exodus 3:5), the Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 12:11), and Yeshua Himself (Matthew 3:11). All of these people wore shoes. "But I don't wear them on the Sabbath because it's holy", he said, Yes, the Sabbath is holy, but the Bible never prohibits nor suggests we should not wear shoes on the Sabbath. Yes, the priests did not wear

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shoes while performing their services, but our Sabbath fellowships are not at The Temple, and we're not performing the sacrificial duties of the priesthood.

- *Long tzit-tzit* – I mentioned this earlier. Yeshua clearly associated wearing long tzit-tzits with pride. Of course, who is to determine the meaning of 'long'. I think it's interesting that many Jewish men wear a tallit katon and thus their tzit-tzit are not visible, thus no problem with their tzit-tzit being too long. On the other hand, there are some who get distracted because another person is not wearing tzit-tzit.
- *Men wearing shorts* – there's a time and a place for everything, and I submit that a Hebraic fellowship is not the place to look like you just came off the beach. Not that it's necessarily wrong, it's just offensive to and considered disrespectful by those of us who consider that when "*two or three are gathered together in my name*"⁷ we should dress as if we're visiting The King.
- *Women in short skirts* – this is distraction to both men and women. Men, for obvious reasons; women, because they can't believe another woman would dress like that, or that a parent would let their daughter dress that way in a Sabbath fellowship.
- *Women with low cut or loose-necked blouses* – same as above, but with the added problem that often occurs when men and women are dancing in the same circle of women bowing forward and exposing themselves. There have been times when I've had to leave the circle because when the woman across from me performed certain dance steps, you could see down her blouse. It's hard for a man to keep his mind on the intent of the music with this type of distraction.

So whose problem is it, the person who's dressing offensively or the person who's offended? Let's ask it another way. In the example in Matthew 23:5 was Yeshua wrong in noticing the person with the long tzit-tzit? If we use His example, then the ones who dress offensively are in the wrong. Thus, we should not expect our brother to "just turn his head if he's offended". Instead, we should simply dress in such a way as to not offend our brother, which in many cases simply means to dress in such a way as to not draw attention to ourselves.

But how can we know what's offensive or not. I once attended the Feast of Tabernacles with a rather large corporate church that had a festival site in Hawaii. The 'normal' culture of the church dictated that men wear suits and ties during religious services. On the other hand, the church's local 'Hawaiian' culture permitted men to wear loose 'Hawaiian' shirts. Unfortunately, the church didn't convey the relaxed Hawaiian dress code to those of us from the mainland. Thus, at that first service while dressed in a suit, I felt a little concerned that many of the other men were not wearing a suit, but instead, wearing the Hawaiian norm. Thankfully, the preacher quickly set those of us from the mainland at ease by informing of us the local custom and inviting us to 'loosen up a little while in Hawaii', which we were more than glad to do. This is an example of what I would describe as 'local halacha'.

Halacha is the Hebrew term for 'how one walks' or in layman's terms – how a person observes the commandments. It comes from the Hebrew word *yalak* that we discussed earlier. Because YHVH left some 'grey area' in regards to the observance of some commandments, it's up to men to determine what is acceptable behavior in certain circumstances. The problem comes in when one person thinks something is acceptable and another does not. To alleviate these problems, the Jewish leaders have made many of these determinations and they call them 'halacha'.

⁷ Matt. 18:20

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In the Hawaiian case, the local church leaders had determined that it's OK for men to wear the loose Hawaiian shirts to the religious services. They, in effect, had set the halacha for dress in that area. Yet, back in the mainland, the leaders had determined that the halacha be coats and ties. Thus, a man wearing a loose Hawaiian shirt in say – Nebraska, would be dressing immodestly since he did not follow the local halacha.

Most of us have come out of churches where (if they admit it or not) the leaders determined the halacha for dress, and the rest of us complied. Unfortunately, within the Hebraic community, there is a resistance to any type of halacha. Our 'freedom from the oppressive minister' had led us to resist any type of rules or authority. Thankfully, that's beginning to change. As we've matured in our freedom, we've come to learn that anarchy is not godly. YHVH expects the camp of Israel to come together in unity. Only with unity of spirit and the willingness to submit to authority in respect to the 'grey areas' of the commandments, can we come together and present ourselves as the single bride of Messiah.

If the various Hebraic fellowships and seminar leaders would begin to adopt basic standards of modesty for their group or event, then publish them so all in attendance will know, we might begin to get a handle on the problem of immodest dress in the Hebraic community. If we are going to be a part of the restoration of all things, we will have to accept the fact that we are our brother's keeper.

Shalom Aleichem