

# Nudity

## (An Every-Verse Method study)

By K. Scott Schaeffer

(All Bible quotes from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted)

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For many Christians, including myself, we were taught growing up that nudity was sin number one. We were taught that it's wrong to allow members of the opposite sex to see our private body parts, and that it's wrong to look at the private body parts of members of the opposite sex. We were taught that any exposure of private body parts (or, 100 years ago, even the exposure of knees and shoulders) causes sexual immorality and angers God.

But is this what the Bible teaches?

Many people believe that men's overwhelming attraction to the sight of body parts is natural and only avoidable by hiding bodies from view. Indeed, that's what our culture, and especially, Christians, have taught us. But that's not what the Bible teaches us. Here's a look at what the Bible says about nudity:

**Genesis 2:24-25**, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed."

**Context:** These verses follow the description of the creation of Eve. They also wrap up the creation story.

**Analysis:** Since these verses describe the state of humans before the fall, we may conclude that both marriage and nudity represent a part of God's original design for mankind. Yet today, we use this quote to promote marriage, while we ignore this quote when we prohibit nudity.

**Genesis 3:7**, “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.”

**Context:** This verse is included in the story of the fall of man. Just prior to this verse, Adam and Eve obeyed the serpent who told them to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil so that they may be like God. By doing so, Adam and Eve disobeyed God. After eating the fruit, Adam and Eve realized that they were naked and felt the need to cover up.

**Analysis:** We see here that it was Adam and Eve’s decision to wear clothing, not God’s. Nowhere does God command Adam and Eve to put some clothes on.

Some Christians believe that the forbidden fruit represents sex. However, the Bible shows that it doesn’t. First of all, God told Adam that he could not eat of this fruit before Eve was even created (Genesis 2:16-17). Second, the fruit was from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, not the tree of sex. Third, God’s instruction in Genesis 2:24 was for the two to become one flesh. In other words, He instructed Adam and Eve to have sex.

**Genesis 3:9-11**, “But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ He said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’ He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’”

**Context:** As the story continues, Adam and Eve meet God for the first time after eating the forbidden fruit.

**Analysis:** Notice that Adam and Eve are unconcerned over seeing each other naked. They are only concerned that God will see them. After eating the forbidden fruit, they knew they were sinful and that God would be unhappy with them, so they tried to cover up their physical bodies, because that was all they could cover. There was no way they could cover their consciences.

**Genesis 3:21**, “And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.”

**Context:** This verse appears after God told Adam and Eve how their lives were about to become difficult as a result of their sin. This verse appears before God banished them from the Garden of Eden.

**Analysis:** The Bible gives no reason for God's decision to make clothing for Adam and Eve. The act reveals both God's compassion for them, despite their great sin against Him, and His realization that their shame was irreversible at this point in time. So, out of His mercy, He aided them in covering that shame as much as possible.

To believe that God made clothing for Adam and Eve so they would not see each other naked is illogical. They were husband and wife and would go on to have at least three children together, so we know that they continued to see each other naked. Since the garden was devoid of other people at this time, we cannot conclude that God clothed them so others would not see their nakedness. Since God created their clothing immediately before He banished them from the Garden of Eden, it's likely that He did so to protect them from the elements (cold, rain, sunburn, etc.) of the outside world.

**Genesis 9:20-25**, "Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, 'Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.'"

**Context:** This story appears after the flood and after God makes a covenant with Noah. Noah curses his grandson, Canaan, because Canaan's father, Ham, saw his nakedness and told others about it.

**Analysis:** Shame over nudity was big in the early years of the Bible, but this shame was not commanded by God. It was merely part of the culture. We must be careful not to assume that the behavior of Old Testament characters results from the command of God. God never commanded that people feel shame over nudity.

Notice that Noah was ashamed that his *sons* saw his nakedness. Women were not involved here. This shame over nudity had nothing to do with the opposite sex. If this shame were indeed required by God, we would be in defiance of Him today when exposing our bodies in same-sex locker rooms and restrooms.

**Isaiah 20:2-4**, "...at that time the Lord had spoken to Isaiah son of Amoz, saying, 'Go, and loose the sackcloth from your loins and take your sandals off your feet,' and he had done so, walking naked and barefoot. Then the Lord said, 'Just as my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as captives and the Ethiopians as exiles, both the young and the old, with buttocks uncovered—to the shame of Egypt.'"

**Context:** These verses follow a couple chapters in which God prophecies against Egypt and Cush (now Ethiopia). This particular prophecy foretells their being led away as captives, naked.

**Analysis:** While Isaiah was not naked by his own choosing, the fact that God ordered him to go about naked demonstrates that He did not oppose public nudity. As I stated in the *Creationism* study, God never leads His people to sin.

**Job 24:7, 10**, "They lie all night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold."

**Isaiah 58:6-7**, "Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?"

**Ezekiel 18:5,7**, "If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right...does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment..."

**Matthew 25:41-46**, "Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I

was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they will also answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you? Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

**James 2:15-16**, “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?”

**Analysis:** Notice that these quotes never say, “If you see someone naked, look away, so you don’t become aroused.” In fact, no Bible verses attribute sexual sin to nudity. Rather, they attribute nudity to poverty.

Public nudity appears to have been common in both Old and New Testament times, as hieroglyphics show ancient Egyptian slaves/servants going about naked, while both Mark 14:52 and Acts 19:16 recount a couple of people losing all of their clothing (which apparently came off easily) when someone tried to seize them. It’s possible that public nudity may have even been a turn-off in those days, because people have historically been attracted to appearances associated with prosperity (like obesity in the Middle Ages), not poverty.

I could have listed more verses which associate nudity with poverty, and I could have listed prophecies that associate nudity with poverty, shame, and losing all that one has. But I’m sure you get the point: nudity and sexual immorality are biblically unrelated.

Some might argue that the anti-incest verses of Leviticus 18 & 20 associate sex with nudity, because the more literal Bible translations like the NASB use the words “uncover the nakedness of...” to describe incest. Notice, however, that to uncover someone else’s nakedness, a person must actively remove the clothing of another, since sex is difficult to perform when clothed. These verses do not label nudity as a cause for sin. Rather, they forbid the removal of clothing from family members for the purpose of having sex with them.

**1 Timothy 2:9**, "...women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes..."

**Context:** Verse 8 is a request for men to pray, and verses 11-15 address whether women should have authority over men. Chapter 3 then presents qualifications for the appointments of elders and deacons.

**Analysis:** This verse defines what it means to "dress modestly." It opposes women wearing expensive, fancy clothing as a means of showing off. Today, this message applies more to the wearing of jewelry and designer clothes than it does the revealing of skin. That's not to say Christian women may show off their bodies by wearing revealing clothing or clothes that make body parts appear larger than they are. Doing so will trigger men's sexual interest and create temptation.

Some Christians say that women should cover everything that might be appealing to a man, but that's a bit extreme. If we were to be consistent in that argument, we would have to discourage Christian women from showing their hair, because many men find long hair attractive. The only reason we don't become aroused by the sight of it is that we see it all the time and nobody forbids us from seeing it. If, however, all American women kept their hair covered, as fundamentalist Islamic women do, we men would be sexually aroused in the rare instance that we see a woman's forbidden long hair.

If the Bible neither opposes nudity nor labels it as a cause for sex, why then do so many of us label it as a big sin? We do it for the same reasons as usual: because it's measurable, and it's perceived to be a sin-preventionism. Like most measurable sins, nudity attracts far more scorn than biblical sins like gossip, slander, and judgmentalism, because nudity is visible, and these biblical sins are not. Prohibition of nudity is also a sin-preventionism, because we believe that people will face greater sexual temptation when seeing nudity.

Indeed, public nudity does pique most men's sexual interest, because we are unaccustomed to seeing it and are raised to think it's a big deal. If we had been raised in a society in which nudity was common, and neither hyped nor opposed, we'd have a healthy attitude toward it. But since the church has forbidden it and linked it to sex for hundreds of years, we are mired in a distorted view of it.

On the other hand, if nudity and revealing outfits were to never be seen again, men would still experience the same level of sexual desire and temptation. They would focus their desire on whatever they could see. I was once told by a Marine who served in Afghanistan that some Afghan men were attracted to women with bushy eyebrows. Why? Because that's all they could see. Likewise, if we were all nudists, men's sexual desire would not be any greater than what we experience today. No matter what the dress code, men's sexual desires will remain constant, and men will be most tempted by the most attractive women.

I'm not recommending that we become nudists. If we did, we'd refuse to sit down on public transportation and church pews unless we first cleaned them with sanitary wipes and disinfectants. Yet we'd have no pockets in which to carry them.

The proper Christian approach to nudity is to avoid its over-hype. When we teach young people that it's a big deal, it becomes a big deal. It doesn't matter whether we make it a big bad deal or a big great deal. Attitudes won't change overnight, however, since our society as a whole makes it a big great deal. But we need to remember that they do so as a reaction against longtime Christian anti-nudity over-hype.