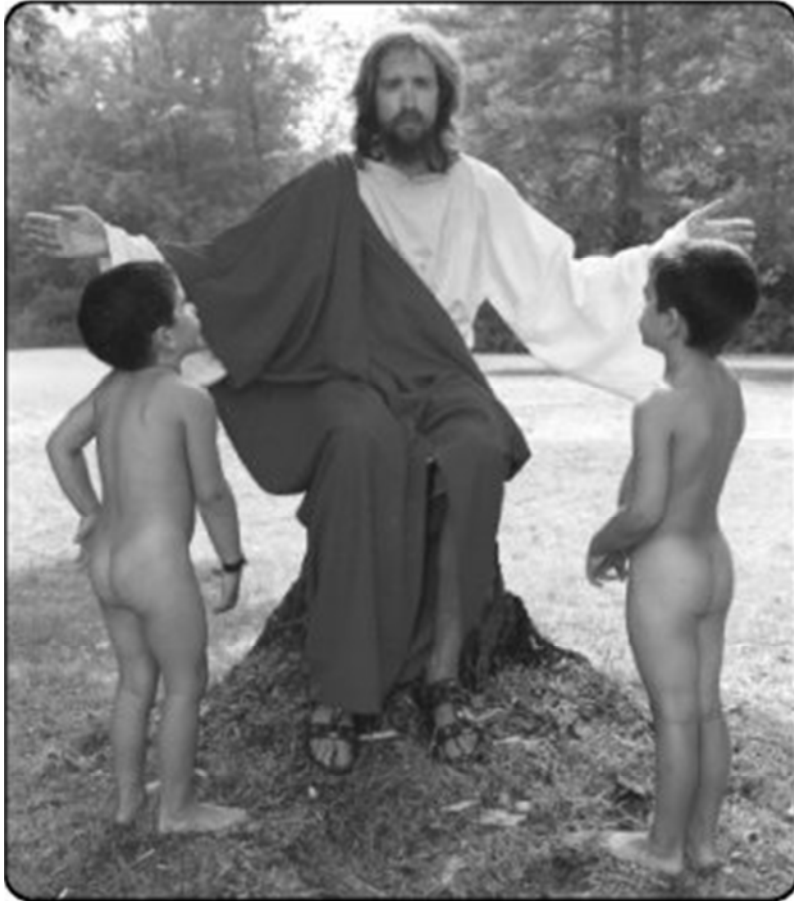


NUDITY IN THE BIBLE

By Paul Bowman,

(Legal Symposium Speech)

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Twenty years ago, I heard about a natural hot spring in northern Idaho, called Jerry Johnson Hot Springs, that had been used by the local Indians for centuries. It sounded like an idyllic place to visit on a summer weekend, so my wife and I decided to try it. After we were set up at a nearby campground, I took my two-year-old daughter and started on the mile hike up to the hot springs.

To my surprise, when I arrived at the clearing in the forest, there were about forty-five to fifty people scattered over the hillside in small groups at the several hot pools – and almost all were naked! I decided to walk across the hillside to the top of the clearing to peruse this unexpected sight. As I carried my daughter by one of the pools, a college-age girl looked up at us and simply said, “Hi.” I guess I mumbled something appropriate, all the while thinking of the old saying, “What do you say to a naked lady?” One feature of the scene I observed was that it looked much more like the Garden of Eden to me than the Den of Hedonistic Iniquity I had always been taught that open nakedness would

bring. I could not see anything untoward; everybody was behaving just as they would if they had all been clothed at a church camp. Clearly, this challenged my Christian education related to nudity.

Being a long-time Evangelical Christian, I did not wish to do anything contrary to Scripture. On the other hand, I am 100% Swedish and I could recall, as a child, envying my cousins back in Sweden because they did not have to wear a cold, clammy bathing suit when they went to the lake or beach. I didn’t think my cousins were hedonistic sexual sinners (and indeed, at least my Swedish relatives aren’t) so, clearly, I needed to study the Church doctrines regarding nakedness a bit more.

That weekend, we did not join the naturist because I needed to be absolutely sure, Biblically, that it was not inconsistent with Christian Scripture. When I got home to my personal library (now approaching 5,000 volumes), my initial study quickly showed that most of the Biblical arguments against nakedness are based on passages that did not directly mention nakedness. This seemed strange, since I believed that it made more sense, in determining a Biblical doctrine, to use first the verses that directly address the matter in question. I knew there were many such passages.

For example, one of the frequently used arguments against nudity is the comment that Jesus made that “Whoever looks upon a woman to lust commits adultery.” The argument they make is that since seeing a naked woman causes lust, and that’s as good as breaking the seventh Commandment, it is a sin to view a naked person of the opposite sex. This is often combined with St. Paul’s remark that a Christian should do nothing to cause a brother to stumble (from the faith). Since nakedness arouses lust, merely being naked (especially women) is a sin because it is likely to cause a brother to stray from the faith. All of these seemed to me to be based on assumptions that, as a practical matter,

were not true. The naked tribes of the South American jungles manage to maintain their society and culture in spite of their nakedness. They did not burn uncontrollably with lust or hedonism, although they may be more openly sexual than Americans. I knew that my Swedish cousins also managed to live reasonably moral lives. Therefore, I decided to begin my Biblical study of nakedness only with Scripture that directly addressed the question of nakedness.

The first mention of nakedness in the Bible comes in the second chapter of Genesis, where it is reported that when God finished creating Man and Woman “the man and his wife were naked and not ashamed.” For a would-be naturist, that’s a pretty good start! One should note, also, that in this passage, “ashamed” is not synonymous with “embarrassed.” The Hebrew word translated as “ashamed” implies more than an internal emotion; it suggests that the feeling should be strong enough to prevent an action.

Finally, God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, clothed them, and then sent them out from the Garden of Eden. However, right on the heels of creation we have the third chapter of Genesis. This is the chapter that relates what is generally known as The Fall of Man, or, simply, The Fall. We all know the story where the serpent comes and tempts Eve to eat the fruit of the tree; that by doing so she will be like God, knowing good from evil. Soon, Adam ate of the fruit as well, and when they did, “the eyes of both of the were opened and they knew they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.” Later, in the cool of the day, when they heard God moving in the Garden, they hid so He called to them, “Where are you?”

Adam replied, “I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked.” Finally, God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, clothed them, and then sent them out from the Garden of Eden. It is often argued, not only in Judeo-Christian theology, but also in Muslim theology, that this shows that Man is obliged by God to wear clothes. There are a few problems with this interpretation, however.

First, the passage says plainly that God came to Adam and Eve in the “cool of the day.” This suggests that, once they left the paradise of the Garden, they would feel the chill if their bodies were naked. By making warm skin garments, God was probably showing His love for them because He knew they would need the garments for warmth. Even more important, God did not simply kick Adam and Eve out into the cold world to fend for themselves. For their sin, He declared several consequences. He told the woman that because of their sin, He would “multiply your pain in childbirth,” yet her sexual “desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” For Adam, God mandated that “In toil you shall eat of your life – thorns and thistles shall grow” in his fields and it would be “by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.” Finally, they would die. These are the only consequences of their sin that God proclaimed. It seems reasonable that if God deemed clothes to be used as punishment or as a moral necessity, He would have stated that as well.

The shame Adam and Eve felt was not specifically for their nakedness; it was that once they ate of the fruit, their perfect spiritual relationship with God was broken. Sin of any kind always interferes with Man’s spiritual relationship with God. It was because their sin broke their spiritual relationship with God, therefore, that they were ashamed. When that spiritual perfection was broken, Adam and Eve then became aware of their physical dimension and how it conflicted with their spiritual natures. In their failed attempt to conceal the breach in their spiritual relationship with God, they tried to hide their physical dimension. Indeed, one could argue that to insist that people cover their bodies, they are continuing to try to hide an enduring breach of Man’s spiritual relationship with God!

Before continuing, I should comment a little bit on the relationship of shame to nakedness. We have just seen that when Adam and Eve sinned, they became ashamed by their nakedness.

Many times in Scripture, nakedness is associated with shame, and this seems to have caused a lot of confusion among Christian and Jewish theologians. Modern theologians seize on the shame aspect to link it to nakedness to bolster their notion that nakedness is shameful.

What they fail to notice – or at least to emphasize – is that in every Biblical incidence where shame is associated with nakedness, a sin against God has already been committed. The shame is for their sin, not their nakedness. It seems to be human nature, starting with Adam and Eve, to try to cover one’s body to hide the “evidence” of sin. Therefore, God says that He will expose later people’s nakedness to expose the shame of their sin; they cannot hide their bodies to hide their sin any more than Adam and Eve could.

After Adam and Eve, probably the most commonly used Biblical argument to condemn nakedness is the story of Noah . In this story, Noah planted a vineyard and eventually he got drunk. While he was drunk in his tent, he was undressed. Ham, one of Noah’s sons saw him and told his two brothers. The brothers took a garment and, walking

backwards into Noah's tent, they covered their father. The Bible plainly says that they did not see their father's nakedness.

The simplistic explanation of this situation is that this shows we are not to be naked nor look upon another's nakedness. Our example is Shem and Japheth, Noah's sons, because they refused to look at their father's naked body. If one takes the time to look at the whole story, this makes no sense at all!

In the first place, Noah was naked inside his tent. If one is to take this story as a condemnation of nakedness, they would have to argue that it is even a wrongdoing to be naked within the walls of one's own home! Some might try to argue that, at least, children should not see their parents naked by following this example. This, too, would be a misinterpretation.

To understand this narration of Noah, his sons and his grandson, Canaan, one must take a close look at the original Hebrew meanings of the word we translate as "naked." If either the words "arom" or "erom" were used, a case could be made that mere nakedness should not be seen, at least by a person's children. Arom is the Hebrew word used to describe Adam and Eve's innocent nakedness while in the Garden of Eden. Erom is the Hebrew word the prophet Ezekiel used in an allegory centuries later to describe the adolescent nakedness portrayed as God's chosen people.

In the passage describing Noah's nakedness, however, the Hebrew word used is "ervah." This word carries the connotation of nakedness connected with indecency or something shameful. Clearly, by the author's choice of the word ervah, more than simple, innocent nakedness is portrayed in this story of Noah. Let me take a few moments here to make a few observations on the relationship of drunkenness to nakedness. Centuries after Noah, the prophet Habakkuk proclaimed:

Woe to you who make your neighbors drunk,
Who mix in your venom even to make them drunk
So as to look on their nakedness!
You will be filled with disgrace rather than honor
Now you yourself drink and expose your own nakedness . . .
and utter disgrace will come upon your glory.

In this passage, the word translated as nakedness comes from the Hebrew word "maor", which refers to the pudendum, or the visible sexual organs. This would suggest that getting someone drunk to get them to remove their clothes is shameful. Jeremiah, in his Lamentation, also connected being bare in relation to drunkenness is something shameful. Therefore, one could argue that Noah's drunkenness in relationship to his being naked was something reprehensible. When Noah sobered up, and realized what his youngest son had done to him, he cursed Ham's son, Canaan. It's possible that Noah cursed Canaan for getting him drunk and exposing his nakedness, but a lifetime, generational curse for such a transgression seems overly harsh. Even more important, the Hebrew word, ervah, used to describe Noah's nakedness is the same word used repeatedly throughout the Old Testament to describe sexual intercourse or sexual activity.

Of course, the story says Noah was so drunk that he must have fallen asleep – "he awoke from his wine." This makes it unlikely that he was engaging in sexual intercourse when his two sons walked backwards into his tent to cover him. Still, the words clearly suggest that there was some sexual component to Noah's nakedness. One Rabbi comments that the word applied in this situation was "used for 'to take to wife' in alliances that can never be regarded as 'marriage'." However, no woman is mentioned in the account, so it is doubtful that the sexual conduct was heterosexual.

Whatever actually happened to Noah has long been forgotten today. It does seem reasonable to infer, however, that whatever it was happened between Noah and his grandson, Canaan. Perhaps, Noah's youngest son (Canaan's father) saw what was happening and reported it to his older brothers. Two possibilities have been suggested to have happened to cause Noah to curse Canaan. They may be sodomy and castration. Both, of course, were soundly condemned in later Israelite Law. At any rate, it should be clear that whatever occurred in this story of Noah, it was strongly tinged with a sexual component. It, clearly, was not innocent, non-erotic nakedness. Therefore, it cannot be used to condemn nakedness per se. One of my favorite Biblical passages that I like to "spring" on so-called Scriptural opponents of nakedness is the story of Isaiah. When a Fundamentalist tries to convince me that God condemns nakedness, I like to set them up for a little surprise. I first ask them if their God ever asks or instructs His people to sin. Of course, they always emphatically say He doesn't.

If that is true, I inquire of them, why did God command Isaiah to sin? After the King of Assyria had captured a place called Ashdod, God told Isaiah to “go naked and barefoot” for three years! This was to be a sign that even those who fled to Egypt would be led away captive, naked and barefoot, by the Assyrian king.

Therefore, as a faithful servant of God, Isaiah went naked and barefoot a full three years. When it is no longer possible to deny that God said Isaiah...in every Biblical incidence where shame is associated with nakedness, a sin against God has already been committed. The shame is for their sin, not their nakedness. should go naked, the fundamentalists typically seize on the last part that says “the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. . .” This, they say, shows that nakedness is shameful. Again, we find two different Hebrew words used in this short passage. Yes, the word translated as shame is *ervah* – the Hebrew word that depicts a shameful or sexual nakedness. All the references to merely being naked come from the word *arom*. This, we have already seen, describes the nakedness of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Thus, both Isaiah and the captive’s nakedness are equated with the nakedness Adam and Eve experienced when they were not ashamed.



The most that could be argued from this passage is that it is shameful to be forcibly stripped naked and led away as captives. However, that has nothing to do with the nakedness within families or as naturists. Also, even if we accept the premise that it is shameful to be forcibly stripped naked, it does not follow that it is also shameful to voluntarily strip naked.

One of the most common arguments against social nakedness is that it is somehow offensive to others who do not wish to see someone else naked. While naturists, as well as anyone else, should always be considerate of other people’s sensibilities, the story of Isaiah shows that there is no Scriptural basis to argue that such consideration is paramount. God certainly would have known that many people would encounter the naked Isaiah; he was to not even wear shoes! Since he was to be naked for three years, surely scores of people would have been faced with his nudity. God would have to be a strange and imperfect deity to order His servant to expose his naked body if it was somehow sinful or immoral. Neither did God offer any provision for those who would somehow be offended.

I’m reminded of a situation I once observed in Vancouver, Canada when I was driving down Marine Drive, one of the main streets in Vancouver. There was a man doing his lunch-hour jog on the sidewalk – totally naked (except, I believe, he did wear running shoes). I don’t know if this was a daily jog or not, but the people along the way merely glanced at him as he ran along. If there was any reaction from the observers, it was an embarrassed smile. The total scene reminded me of Isaiah going naked in his land many centuries ago.

The very fact that God ordered Isaiah to go naked, and that he obeyed God by walking about naked in public for three years should convince even the most anti-nakedness Bible student that public nudity is neither shameful nor offensive. It certainly should convince them at it is not a sin or any kind of immorality. To deny that Isaiah’s nakedness was innocent is to declare that God himself can and will command His servants to sin. Such a notion is preposterous!

Anyone who tries to argue that Isaiah was an exception, and therefore cannot be used to accept public nakedness, needs to be reminded of the other prophets. It was, apparently, somewhat common for God’s prophets to go naked. Saul was the first King of Israel and he temporarily took on the “mantle” of prophet in the first book of Samuel.

Saul was traveling to Naioth in Rama when the Spirit of God came upon him. So, as a prophet, he stripped off his clothes and prophesied in front of Samuel. He was naked all that day and night. When the people saw him, they wondered if King Saul was also one of the prophets.

I probably should point out that the Hebrew word used to describe King Saul’s nakedness is the word *arom*, the word for innocent, shameless nakedness. It is often argued that after the Fall of Man, the connotation of nakedness

changed from one of innocence to one of indecency. If so, the author of this story must have not gotten the message because they used the word for King Saul's nakedness that refers to innocence, not the other Hebrew words available to depict indecency. It seems from the passage that King Saul was not the only one in that scene who was naked. The text says that King Saul "also" stripped off his clothes, suggesting that there were other prophets present. Since the nakedness of the group of prophets did not seem to be a problem to the spectators, one would suppose that nakedness in that time was rather common. At least, the people paid more attention to the fact that the king was a prophet than to the fact that he had no clothes!

Next, we have a story of King David dancing naked in the "town square." In this situation, the Ark of the Covenant had been held by one of Israel's enemies and now was being returned to Jerusalem. David was so happy that he met the caravan carrying the ark and as it entered the city, Michael, David's wife looked out of the palace window to see her husband dancing before the Lord wearing only a linen ephod.

Michael, like many wives today, was scandalized by the sight so when David returned to the palace, she lit into him. "How the King of Israel distinguished himself today! He uncovered himself in the eyes of his servant's maids as one of the foolish ones shamelessly uncovers himself!" David rebuked her, saying he would be more lightly esteemed and humble in his own eyes, but that with the maidens of whom Michael spoke he would be distinguished.

There can be no mistake in this passage because the Hebrew word translated as "uncovered" is "galah." This word specifically refers to a genital uncovering. [Often it has a sexual connotation, as well. However, we can assume that David wasn't having sex since it says he was dancing, although there may have been an erotic overtone to his dance.] The text says he was wearing a linen ephod, one of the priests garments that probably could best be described as the bib or top part of a jumper (without the skirt attached).

Again, from this passage we see that no Scriptural credence is given to those who may be offended by one's nakedness. Michael's offense was sternly rebuked. Doesn't it seem reasonable that if nakedness in a public situation – especially the town square – was against Biblical values that David would have been rebuked, not his wife who claimed to be offended? If we are to take the Bible as our example, it is not the naked one but the one who protested who is going contrary to Scripture. The last verse in this passage also raises an interesting question. It says that Michal had no child to the day of her death. This suggests to me that this verse is inferring that those who cannot cope with nakedness have some kind of sexual hang-up that often prevents pregnancy.

It is no secret that to older children and young adolescents the Sunday sermon is often very boring. Not a few schoolboys – and girls – have taken that opportunity to spice up that time by reading passages from the Song of Solomon! At least, I know that is how it was with my friends – we could look to the congregation like we were following the sermon's references while being titillated right from the Bible. You can read the wonderful description of the female body given in The Song of Solomon and of the human male body in the same book. These texts include such female descriptions as "your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a Gazelle" and "your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts like its clusters (of fruit)." The male is equally well treated: "his abdomen is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires. . ." I cannot add anything to these descriptions that would be more positive of the naked human body.

In the Old Testament references to nakedness there are several mandates where clothes must be worn.

One such passage relating to the body being covered is in the book of Ezekiel. This text says, "Then you grew up, became tall, and reached the age for fine ornaments; your breasts were formed and your (pubic) hair had grown. Yet you were naked and bare. Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold you were at the time for love; so I spread my skirt over you and covered your nakedness."

For an allegory to be effective as a social example, the basic elements must be familiar to the listeners; at least, they must not be so unfamiliar that the lesson loses its effectiveness because of the circumstances described. In this situation, it is clear that the young girl described was naked and bare. Even as an adolescent, the subject of this allegory was naked. Child, and even adolescent, nakedness could not have been too uncommon at that time, then, because if it had been the nakedness of the heroine would have distracted from the lesson of the parable.

This is probably the best Biblical indication that childhood and early adolescent nakedness is not the shocking, dangerous condition we make of it in our society. [I might add that I have written a small book on this subject. What it attempts to do is show how our American obsession with keeping children from being naked or exposed to other's nakedness may be the etiology of all manner of adult sexual perversions and compulsions. Cases can certainly be made that such sexual anomalies as promiscuity, voyeurism, pedophilia and others may be an outgrowth of our



society's hysterical fear of childhood nakedness.] In Ezekiel, the nakedness of the growing maiden is translated from the Hebrew *erom* which means simply “without clothes.”

There is no sexual or negative connotation.

However, when the maiden reaches “the time for love” we find the word describing that nakedness comes from the Hebrew word *ervah*. This, we have seen, is a Hebrew word for nakedness with a sexual connotation. For that nakedness, the maiden is covered with a blanket or skirt.

The lesson related to nakedness from Ezekiel is clear. The innocent, non-erotic nakedness of a young child or maiden is of no concern from a Biblical point of view. However, when one is ready for love, the sexual nakedness should be covered. I doubt this means that only sex under blankets is morally acceptable; it probably means that sexual activity should be private, behind closed doors.

It may be appropriate to note here that I have also written an extensive history of nakedness in the West. [I've additionally written a complete study of nakedness in other cultures before much exposure to Western values.] Probably the single biggest factor in any society outlawing public or social nakedness is that it tends to degenerate into public sex acts. This was true from the German public baths during the Middle Ages to the English “living statue” exhibitions late in the Nineteenth Century and in many other instances.

This is one area where naturists probably should be able to join forces with our society's Evangelical religious elements. It may not be that many Christian fundamentalist are not afraid of innocent nakedness per se; I would submit that what they really fear is that it will lead to lasciviousness and sexual immorality. From historical experience, they have good reason for their fear. Naturists, it seems, would do well to make it absolutely clear in the public mind that naturism is social nakedness and not erotic nakedness. They should make it categorically clear that they want laws prohibiting, and serious enforcement prosecuting public sex acts. Live erotica, such as nude barroom dancing, which is clearly intended to sexually arouse the viewers probably could be discouraged since it is much more likely to lead to sexual activity than, say, nudists playing volley ball on the beach.

It seems reasonable for one to conclude from this allegory that sexual activity should be covered. Reading further in this passage, we see how God adorned His partner with fine silks, linens, jewelry and a crown. This enhanced her beauty and increased her status to that of royalty. From this, we can deduce that clothes are Biblically legitimate to enhance one's beauty and to indicate social status. Recalling the story of Adam and Eve, where God gave them skins to cover themselves when He cast them out of the Garden into the cool of the evening, we know that clothes are legitimate

for protection from the weather as well.

While we can infer from Ezekial that clothes should cover sexual activity, there is no question about the Israelite priests. In the book of Exodus, God commands that the priests must wear certain vestments. Included in these priestly instructions is the specific statement that “you shall make for them linen breeches to cover their bare flesh; they shall reach from the loins even to the thighs. And they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they enter the tent of meeting, or when they approach the alter to minister in the Holy Place. . .”

This is the only case in Biblical Scripture where clothes are commanded to be worn. Let me repeat: there is only one place in the Holy Bible where clothes of any sort are required to be worn. This was specifically for the priests, and then only when they were in the meeting place or temple or when they approached the altar. There is nothing that prevents them – or anybody else – from nakedness in other non-erotic situations or elsewhere.

In a very real way, this helps to complete the Biblical perspective on nakedness. By giving many, many instances of nakedness throughout the whole Bible, it is clear that there is no wholesale Biblical prohibition of nakedness. By giving some instances where the body is to be covered, limits to nakedness are set by God. From this, we can know the parameters of where the Bible's God stands on the issue; we are not left to create our own theology.

From several references in the Bible, death may also have been a time for nakedness. Job, noted for his many tribulations, said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there.” Everyone, of course, is born naked. This verse

suggests that it may have been a common practice to be stripped naked in preparation for impending death. The book of Ecclesiastes, which is traditionally ascribed to Solomon, agrees. We have seen that the Bible seems to accept childhood nakedness – that is, before the age of sexual reproduction, children were probably permitted to go naked. From my studies of the ethnography of nakedness, it is certain that many cultures also sanctioned nakedness in people too old for sexual reproduction. It is likely that this practice occurred in ancient cultures, as well. If so, it is possible that Biblical Israel condoned the same practice for elderly people. We certainly know that it is common practice in many cultures to tear one's clothes in mourning the death of a relative. This also was a custom in ancient Israel. Frequently, throughout the Bible, people in great stress tore their clothes. Indeed, for the ancient Israelites, more than tearing of the clothes was needed. Micah said, speaking about a judgment about to fall on his nation, “Because of this I must lament and wail, I must go barefoot and naked; I must make a lament like the jackals and a mourning like the ostriches.”

Notice that Micah said he must go naked and barefoot. It would seem that it was socially expected to go naked during times of great stress or mourning. At any rate, there is no biblical condemnation for nakedness in these situations. There is one last Biblical passage that may touch on nakedness. God told Abraham, “And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.” It would seem curious that the very sign of the acceptance of God's covenant with His people would be expected to be fastidiously covered. It is possible that circumcision was to be a concealed sign to oneself, but there is no Biblical indication that it was and no reason to expect so.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

While there are many references to nakedness in the Old Testament, there are only three specific circumstances in the New Testament. There are also a few instances when nakedness is suggested but not directly stated. Finally, there is indication that keeping the body covered is not as high a priority in the Biblical Christian's life as one would expect from today's theology.

“Who is so barbarous as not to understand
That the foot of a man is nobler than his shoe,
And his skin nobler than that of the sheep
With which he is clothed?”
– Michelangelo

The first reference to nakedness is found in the Book of Mark. “And a certain young man was following Him [Jesus], wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. But he left the linen sheet behind, and escaped naked.” Another mention of nakedness comes in the Acts of the Apostles, where some Jewish exorcists were trying to cast out a demon and “the evil spirit leaped on them and subdued both of them and overpowered them so they fled out of the house naked and wounded.” The final example of nakedness is found in the book of John where some of the disciples had been out fishing and Jesus showed up on shore. “. . . And so when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea [to swim to shore].”

One needs to look at all three of these references together to discern an accurate picture of New Testament nakedness. In the first two instances, the nakedness was unexpected. The three people were caught by surprise and fled naked. It should be obvious to the readers that it must not have been the custom to wear an undergarment under their outer robes. Even today, in many Middle Eastern countries, it is often the custom to not wear a second garment under the outer robes.

That they did not customarily wear underclothes does not condone nakedness, of course. The fact that they were surprised and their clothes were removed, leaving them naked, has no bearing on the validity of nakedness in public or in a social situation. We are left, then, with the story of Peter fishing to try to determine the New Testament position on nakedness. Some theologians have argued that Peter was wearing a loin cloth when he removed his garment for fishing. However, if we have two random incidences of his contemporaries having lost their outer robes to be left naked, it is reasonable that this was the custom. Peter, being a part of his culture, undoubtedly did the same. Therefore, when the Bible says that he removed his robe, it is very likely that he was naked. As further evidence, contemporary pictures of Egyptian fisherman show them in complete nakedness as they fished.

Even more important are the words used. The New Testament was translated into English from ancient Greek. The word translated as Peter being “stripped” for work comes from the Greek word “gymnos.” This is exactly the same Greek word translated as naked in the previous two examples. Thus, when one goes back to the original, there is compelling evidence that Peter was completely naked when he fished.

I might add that those who try to argue that he was modestly wearing a loin cloth don't make sense for another reason. The loin cloth would get wet while he was fishing and then he would have had to put on his dry robe over the wet loin cloth. Also, what would be the point of keeping his body covered on a fishing boat with only other men on board?

Because there are no more instances of nakedness in the New Testament, we have to depart from considering direct references to other texts. To continue with Peter, some would wonder why he grabbed his clothes and put them on when he swam to meet Jesus. If he wanted his clothes on shore, which would seem reasonable, it would be a lot easier to swim with them on his body rather than carrying them in one arm. It also could be that Peter, who probably perceived Jesus as divine, would feel that he needed his clothes to approach Jesus, just as the priests needed to be properly covered when they approached God in the holy places of the Temple.

Some light may be shed on this event by another instance during the Last Supper. In this case, “[Jesus] rose from the supper, laid aside his garments; and taking a towel, girded Himself about.” The word translated here as “girded” comes from the Greek word “diazonnumi.” This is the same word used to describe Peter as he put on his garment when he was ready to swim to meet Jesus. The word actually means to tie something around oneself like a belt or a girdle. Therefore, it is likely that both Peter while fishing and Jesus during part of the Last supper were both naked except for a garment or towel tied around their waists.

In neither case does it seem to cause any concern that they were naked except for something tied around their waist. Certainly neither Jesus nor Peter were embarrassed or self conscious since they put themselves in that situation willingly. Also, it seems that it did not arouse any concern among other people who were present in those situations – at least nothing is mentioned of it.

The New Testament mentions several instance where people removed their clothes, but it doesn't specifically say they were naked. This may mean, however, that nudity was simply understood just as if, today, one wrote that a person removed their undershorts or panties it would be assumed that they would be naked. To discern if this may have been true, we need to take a few moments to consider the clothes worn by New Testament figures.

There are several garments mentioned in the New Testament, but there are only two main items. One is an “outer garment” which is translation from the Greek word “himation” and the other is an “inner garment,” usually

translated as coat or tunic, which comes from the Greek “chiton.” The himation is mentioned six times more often in the New Testament than the chiton, suggesting that the himation was much more important.

The chiton was not even owned by everyone. Jesus said, “Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none.” Also, it was the less important garment worn by those who did have one. We can see this because Jesus told his disciples not to own two of them. Even those who did own one did not wear it most of the year in that desert-like Mediterranean land. Jesus gave a hint of His attitude toward the necessity of clothing to cover the naked body when he said, “if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.” In this version, “shirt” is translated from chiton and “coat” is translated from himation. Obviously, if a person in Jesus time gave away both his chiton and his himation (that is, both his shirt and coat), he would have been left naked.

I should point out that this passage is really concerned with how people deal with each other, not with nakedness. By saying that it is better to be left without one's clothes than to treat someone unfairly, Jesus certainly placed human relations far above the need to cover they body. In other words, righteousness is more important than covering the naked body.

We can take a look at a few more Biblical reports of people removing their clothes. Probably the best known was when a young man named Saul, who later became known as St. Paul, witnessed the stoning death of the apostle Stephen. Those who stoned Stephen “laid aside their robes (himation) at the feet” of Saul.

Another instance was when a blind beggar, Bartimaeus, was healed by Jesus. He, “casting aside his cloak (himation).” jumped up and came to the Lord to be healed. If the himation was the only garment worn by most people at that time, it is very likely that when they removed their cloaks they were left naked. That being true, it is interesting that their nakedness was not mentioned. It must have been fairly common. The Biblical account of what we now call Palm Sunday presents another interesting sight. It left a pastor-friend at a church I used to attend scratching his head and sighing, “This is not how I ever envisioned Jesus' entry into Jerusalem!” The disciples, when they secured a donkey for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem, placed their garments on the back of the donkey as a sort of saddle.

Then, when Jesus rode through the city, most of the people spread their garments on the road before Him. In both cases, the garments are translated from the word himation. Since many of the people did not own an undergarment (the chiton), and those who did wouldn't wear them unless it was cold, it is very likely that most of the people watching Jesus ride through the city were naked. It should be noted, also, that the people then viewed Jesus as a sort of king entering the city; they may have specifically removed their clothes to show their subservience to Him.

There are several other incidents we could cover. Jesus told his disciples to not be worried about having enough food or clothes. St. Paul asked if nakedness, among other things, could remove the believer from the love of Christ. He also “boasted” about his suffering and nakedness for Christ's sake. In a third incidence, St. Paul described the Church as a human body, saying that one part (even the unseemly parts) was no more honorable than any other – all are needed to make up a complete human or Church body.

What can we conclude, then? When a careful study of actual, or even allegorically illustrated, nakedness in the Holy Bible is completed, the notion that the state of being naked in a public situation is unscriptural is simply unfounded. It may be argued that such nakedness is unchristian (at least, as Christianity is defined today), but such an argument can be made only to the extent that objective Biblical accounts of nakedness are either ignored or distorted. If nakedness is unchristian, it is only because the Church has developed a theology apart from the Bible truthfully teaches.



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