

Four Little Things

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"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1, 31). God created everything on this earth, and when He had finished creating it He said, *"it was very good."* Everything that God created is very good, and it's all here for a purpose. Job makes it known that one of those purposes is to teach us (Job 12:7-8). I would like to draw your attention to a passage in Proverbs in which the writer tells us of four small, but wise creatures that we should learn about.

Proverbs 30:25 *"The ant is a people not strong, Yet they provide their food in the summer;"*

The first little creature taken into consideration is the ant. We can go outside and utterly destroy an ant bed. Ants are small and weak, but they are very wise! The ants are prepared. They store up food in the summer so that they can eat in the winter (Proverbs 6:6-8).

We too are to prepare for the future. Amos gave a strict warning to the nation of Israel. *"Prepare to meet thy God"* (Amos 4:12). Remember, if you would, the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). There were five who were prepared and five who were not prepared. The five prepared virgins went into the marriage feast, while the five who were not were left outside. Note verse 13: *"Watch therefore for ye know not the day nor the hour."* Always be prepared!

Proverbs 30:26 *"The conies are but a feeble folk, Yet go they forth all of them by bands;"*

The second animal spoken of is an animal called a cony (other translations call it the rock badger). I don't know about all of you, but I've never seen a cony. Basically a cony is a very small creature, somewhat like a rabbit, with small, round ears, and short feet. As you can well imagine, these are very frail creatures. Despite this, however, the cony is smart enough to know that he will be safe among the rocks.

We need to take refuge in the rock as well. We all know the story of the wise man and the foolish man (Matthew 7:24-27). What made the wise man wise? He built on the rock which wouldn't wash away. The sand, on the other hand, washed away at the first sign of trouble. What is the rock that we are to take refuge in? Psalm 31:1-3 says *"In thee, O Jehovah, do I take refuge... for thou art my rock and my fortress."*

Proverbs 30:27 *"The locusts have no king, Yet go they forth all of them in bands."*

Locusts, much like grasshoppers, are very small and can easily be disposed of. Though small, locusts banded together are united. When they swarm together they are very

strong and devour everything in sight. If you've ever seen a locust swarm on television it's an awesome sight. There are, on average, 40-80 million locust in a swarm.

The lesson for us is, I'm sure, very clear already. The church today must be united in order to accomplish its goal. The only way we can become stronger is by banding together. Paul wrote to the Ephesians about unity. He told them that it's something that they would have to work at. "... *giving diligence to keep the unity of spirit in the bond of peace ...*" (Ephesians 4:1-6). "*Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Proverbs 30:28 "*The lizard taketh hold with her hands, Yet is she in Kings' palaces.*"

Again, this is a very small creature. The lizard here is probably more like a gecko in size, some translations even call it a spider. The size and frailty of it, again, show the weakness of it. Despite its size, this lizard works with its hands.

We also must work. We must work in order to be saved. We have to do something, God isn't going to save us for nothing (Acts 2:40). It's also a task we must work toward to stay saved (Luke 9:62).

We must always strive to be like these four creatures. We need to be well prepared like the ant, we need to find refuge in God like the cony finds refuge in the rocks, we must be united with those of like faith like the locust, and we need to work like the lizard. Take the advice of these wise creatures (James 1:5).

What's In A Name?

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The English poet and playwright, William Shakespeare, once posed the question, "What's in a name?" And, although the quote's context in the play *Romeo and Juliet* is speaking to the literal naming of things, the question in and of itself is an interesting one.

Almost no survey class taught over the Old Testament is complete without at least mentioning the meaning behind the names of such men as Abraham "*father of many*", Moses "*one who draws out*", Joshua "*Yahweh is salvation*" and the like. The meaning of many of these names and others are found in concordances and commentaries and oftentimes there is a parallel with the person and their name such as with Abraham in reference to the promise God makes with him (Genesis 17:4-5). There are exceptions to this of course. Cain is believed to mean "*spear*" or some variation thereof, but to Bible students everywhere the name Cain is synonymous with murder. While many were named in the Bible for specific reasons, recall the account in Matthew 1:20-23 of the angel of the Lord telling Joseph to name the Messiah "Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins," and to fulfill that which was written by the prophet Isaiah, there are today parents, whom at their own prompting, will seek to name their children things that em-

body strength of character, reliance on God, faithfulness and truth, and stay away from names that convey the opposite. Just think, do you know anyone named Judas? Or Jezebel? After all, who would ever want their son or daughter associated with such people?

With this in mind, what does the writer of Proverbs 22:1 mean when he says, “*A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, favor is better than silver and gold.*” Does he mean a literal name? To what degree does the name itself speak to the character of the one bearing it? Again in Ecclesiastes 7:1 we’re told, “*A good name is better than a good ointment.*” My name is Christopher, which is of Greek origin meaning Christ-bearer. But, it’s my actions and lifestyle that determine whether such a description fits me. So, to return to the question, “What’s in a name,” the answer is very little just by itself.

In relation to the verses from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, instead of a name in the literal sense, think reputation. A good reputation is to be highly valued. It’s listed among the things an elder should have in 1 Timothy 3:7 and is proven time and again throughout the scriptures as an effective way of spreading God’s word. Where there is a truly good reputation, there is a good example. Simply consider the effects various kings had on their nations, Israel and Judah.

The power of an example should never be underrated. First Corinthians 15:33 says, “*Do not be deceived: bad company corrupts good morals.*” Also, “*A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough*” (Galatians 5:9). Both verses highlight the constant need for good examples in our lives. As Christians we carry His name and must always strive to be agents of positive spiritual change and growth in lives of those around us. This call for a good reputation knows no age limit. In Luke 2:52, the twelve-year-old Jesus is said to have “*kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*”

With all of this said, how can someone go about gaining a *good name*? While such a topic could fill an entire book, let me suggest just a few major things from the scriptures. Consider Psalm 15. David starts off by asking God, “*Who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?*” The answer is one who lives with **integrity**, works **righteousness**, speaks **truth** (v. 2), and **refuses to slander** or do evil to others (v. 3). One who disapproves of those who do evil and **honors those who serve God**. He is someone who **keeps his word** even when it isn’t convenient to do so (v. 4). He is the kind of person that **doesn’t take advantage of others** and while not perfect, is **consistent** in living a godly life (v. 5).

Regardless the kind of name you’ve been making for yourself up to this point, God offers you a clean slate: the gift of forgiveness and the present of today. Change and be committed to serving Him and a good name will follow. The kind of name that people speak as one who encourages, lifts up and proclaims the truth; the kind of name that is needed as we march side by side onward to Zion.

Learning From the Mistakes of Others

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“As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly”(Prov 26:11)

Picture that! God sees us as dogs disgustingly going back to lap up our vomit when we repeat the mistakes we have committed. We have wasted a golden opportunity to learn from our sin and be a better person for our experience.

Picture this! We stand at a fork in the road. It diverges in several directions, and we don't know where each one leads. However, we have in our hands a journal written by people who have traveled each road describing their experiences on that road. Would we not be fools to throw the book away unread and walk wherever we feel is best?

If God expects us to learn from our own mistakes, He assuredly expects us to learn from others' mistakes. All around us, others are making a mess of their lives and leaving us precious opportunities to see the foolishness of the path they have chosen. Will we learn?

Observe the mistakes of others! The wreckage sin leaves is not simply sad; we must notice it to learn from it. Ezekiel describes a man who defiles himself in sin and deserves death (Ezek 18:10-13), but then says, *“If, however, he begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and considers but does not do likewise...he shall surely live!”*(Ezek 18:14, 17). Notice that the son *“sees all the sins which his father has done”*—he is observing! He watches the father's actions and their outcome, and decides he wants to be a different person. Solomon warns us to heed his words, *“to deliver you from the immoral woman...None who go to her return, nor do they regain the paths of life”*(Prov 2:16, 19). Solomon had seen this type of woman and the way she destroyed men's lives—and he had made this mistake himself. Rather than stumbling ourselves, Solomon wants us to learn from his missteps. Something simple must be said: We don't have enough time—or money, or strength—to make all the mistakes in the world! We shouldn't have to probe every path to know it's dangerous! If we hope to survive, we must have the wisdom to observe others' flaws and avoid them!

Isn't observing the mistakes of others one of the main reasons we read the Bible? Paul says of the Jews, *“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come”*(1 Cor 10:11). If we are tempted by sex outside of marriage, can't we see where that path leads by reading the stories of David (2 Sam 11-12), Samson (Judges 16), and Amnon (2 Sam 13)? Doesn't Solomon remind us of the emptiness of riches and partying (Eccl 2:1-11, 1 Pet 4:1-4)? God didn't write these stories to give us a history book, but so we could observe their mistakes. Add to their testimony what we see around us—jails teeming with convicts who started by just “running with the wrong crowd,” homes wrecked by adultery, pornography, and divorce, and millions dying of lung cancer, cirrhosis, and drunk driv-

ing. Do we have to end up this way to learn something? Can we afford not to observe others' mistakes?

Don't think you're immune! Somehow we think we'll never end up here—not me! We are not the first to think so. When Jesus told Peter he would deny Him, Peter protested, "*Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble*" (Matt 26:33). Not me, Lord, I would never do that! God addresses this directly: "*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*" (1 Cor 10:12). It will happen to you! The physical and spiritual consequences of sin come on all those who commit them. We must observe others' mistakes, but not with hopes of looking down on them in sin, but to apply the lessons directly to ourselves. Remember: no one started out in life hoping to be divorced and lonely, or contract a sexually transmitted disease, or go to prison. Yet if we don't apply their mistakes to ourselves, we are doomed to repeat them!

Choose better! Yes, we can do better! Remember that evil man—"If, however, he begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and considers but does not do likewise" (Ezek 18:14). We can choose a better path than our parents, if their path has led to sin. We can choose a better path than our classmates and co-workers. Knowing where the road leads, we can turn our back on it. Speaking of young people conspiring to do evil, Solomon warns, "*My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path*" (Prov 1:15). Choose better!

In some matters of morality there are gray areas as to what God wants. How short is too short? How far is too far? How much is too much? Remember this principle: "*Abstain from every form of evil*" (1 Thess 5:22). Remember the mistakes of others, and that many started down the road to sin by telling themselves it was a gray area. Choose better!

We stand at a fork in the road of our lives. Each day we choose our path, and Satan does all he can to confuse our decision and cloud our judgment. Look at others around you and in the Bible. Remember you are not immune. Choose better!

The Voice of Experience

Bikinis & Boxers

Lawrence Kelley

The Bible does not *specifically* address some of the questions we are likely to ask regarding modesty issues such as "may I wear my polka dot bikini to church?" or "Does it matter if my trousers sag so low that my boxers show?" Because the words *bikini* and *boxers* are not found in scripture some folks assume we are at liberty to do as we please. But this fails to take into account the fact that the Bible primarily teaches us by **principles**. By

remembering this we can avoid two extremes. The first extreme is to absolutize a particular standard for all time. The Amish illustrate this tendency. The other is to foolishly assume that whatever is generally accepted in the unbelieving culture can be adopted by the Christian. Both groups have a lot in common. Neither of them want to do the work of learning the Biblical principles and *thinking* through how they apply to us. But we are **Christians** and are therefore called to *think Christianly* about what we wear.

Consider two Biblical Principles About Clothing:

First, clothing is a form of communication. In Gen 38:14-15 it says Tamar, “took off her **widow's garments**, covered herself with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place ...When Judah saw her, he thought she was a **harlot**, because she had covered her face.” One set of clothes signaled that Tamar was a widow in mourning, the other that she was a harlot. We are not now concerned with which articles of clothing sent which signal. We simply need to see that her clothing did, in fact, send a message. Furthermore, this is not just a “back then” kind of thing. Clothing is still a means of communication. We all know how to tell a Muslim from a Buddhist and at the mall it is easy to tell the Amish from the Goths. Clothing is also used to tell people what kind of work we do. We immediately know a doctor, from a UPS man and a construction worker from a scientist by what they wear. Again, the first principle is that clothing *says* something about the wearer.

Second, clothing should be appropriate to the occasion. Jn 13:4, says Jesus “rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.” The garments Jesus had worn to eat the Passover, were not suited for the task of washing feet. In contrast Jn 21:7 says Peter was striped down in his boat for fishing, but he put his clothes back on before coming ashore to see Jesus. Jesus acknowledges this principle when he speaks of proper clothing for formal events in Matt 22:11-14.

So, if I show up at your daughter's wedding in my workout clothes you have every right to ask me to change. Again, we may differ over exactly what is appropriate for a given circumstance, but at this point let us agree that, in principle, such distinctions should be made. It is therefore reasonable to ask ourselves as we dress for the day, “Am I going to mow the grass or attend a funeral?” “Am I going to math class or attending a wedding?” “Am I Assembling with the saints or going to the gym?”

Both of these principles are issues of modesty. The word **Modesty** literally means *orderly, well arranged, decent*. This obviously requires individual judgment and is somewhat relative to the culture in which one lives. Showing up for a wedding in what was modest in 1896 would be distracting and outrageous in 2008. However, there is a difference between acknowledging that modesty is somewhat relative, and pretending that it is *infinitely malleable*. It is a sinful heart that offends and shocks others while maintaining that modesty is purely up to the individual - “I think my spandex half-shirt is just fine.”

Why do we find it hard to apply these principles today?

First, our culture resents distinctions or hierarchy. This is seen in our tendency toward unisex clothing. Androgyny and gender confusion is actively promoted by popular designers. But God made them male and female. Dressing as a Christian means ac-

knowledging this important distinction and not wearing clothes and hair styles that deliberately try to *obscure* it.

Second, our culture wants to make every occasion casual (except the Oscars, since they are really important). Because we believe that no event is any more meaningful than any another, the idea of dressing up becomes meaningless. But this way of thinking is not only boring, it contradicts the way God made the world. God's creation is filled with wild diversity: mountains, valleys, hot, cold, male, female, sweet, sour, bright, dull, rough, smooth, etc. And, He created a world with a variety of occasions: some festive, some somber, some formal, some casual. This is not an excuse for ostentatious displays of finery or overplaying the importance of outward appearance which are given a good drubbing in scripture (Isa 3:16-24). This is simply a call to think Christianly about what our clothes say about the occasion.

Finally, I want to return to the problem of using clothes to communicating sexual availability. Men are commanded to avoid lustful longing at women (Matt 5:28). Careless women have invented ways to help men violate this commandment. Many clothing styles are designed with this in mind. High midriffs with hip hugger jeans are not an accident. The same is true for low cut blouses, short shorts, bikinis, backless shirts etc.

Whether a woman wears such things with the intent to seduce the minds of men does not alter its effect on the opposite sex. You cannot dress in the provocative styles of the world and expect a different result. If you are not sexually available - don't advertise as if you were. When someone confronts you about it, don't play dumb. In a world as messed up as ours, you can't afford to be dumb. Jesus requires us to be *harmless as doves and wise as serpents*.

Someone has identified the two major problems we face with immodest dress these days as: "**Too little** – cleavage, vast expanse of thigh, exposed midriffs – that sort of thing. Women with this problem dress like a sale at Dillards - 50 % off. This immodesty is compounded by girls who wear short skirts *and* who do not know how to sit like a lady, showing the world what's fore and aft. **Too tight** – A popular mode of disobedience among modern Christians. The whole world is invited to gawk at the *topographical evidence* concerning exactly where her underwear starts and stops, along with the exact condition, location, and size of her breasts. Many Christian women go to church today dressed in a manner that would have gotten them thrown out of a bar fifty years ago."

Some of you are thinking I've said too much, but the real problem is that I've seen too much. The difficulty in confronting immodest dress might be explained this way, We are afflicted with a real problem of schizophrenia. We are playing show and tell, but aren't allowed to tell.

The key to an amiable solution begins with remembering who we are and who we represent whenever we go shopping, "*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have **put on Christ***" (Gal 3:26-27). This truth should govern every shopping decision.