

Reprinted from Jim Cunningham's book *Nudity and Christianity*:

An Open Letter to Evangelicals

Dear Pastor & Parishioners:

After considering your views on nudity I am compelled to write. I can scarcely recall a more biased, deceptive, and unscriptural opinion passed off as "Christianity."

My family and I are now nudists/naturists precisely because of our Scriptural studies, not in spite of it (as some of you would insist). The question came up about nine or ten years ago and, being dedicated Christians, we turned to the Bible to determine how we should choose.

We found repeated "evidence" in the church that social nudity is a sin, but found a far different truth in the Bible. I should point out that our study scrutinized every Biblical reference to "naked," "nakedness," "unclothed," "stripped," "uncovered," etc. We studied each reference in some six or seven translations, versions or paraphrases of the Bible. Your objections to nudity are so devoid of Scriptural knowledge, much less understanding, that it can hardly be called Biblical Christianity. Your incessant linking of nudity with sexual sin, to the exclusion of all else, makes about as much sense as insisting that fire can only be connected to the destruction of property and life, and is therefore totally immoral. Indeed, it makes me wonder just how shallow your understanding of sexuality must also be.

Your "logic" that because God made garments of skins for Adam,² He was thereby condemning the state of nakedness, is about as sensible as concluding that because God made the clouds that blot out the sun, He was condemning sunshine. It is much more likely that Genesis 3:21 shows that God ordained clothes as well as the already ordained nakedness³ Furthermore, because of the fall, Adam was no longer in Eden and was thus subject to the varieties of weather and climate, and God knew they would need clothes. God loved and cared them even after they sinned.

¹This first appeared in *Clothed with the Sun* 7.3 and is reprinted here with the author's permission.

²Cf. Genesis 3:21.

³Cf. Genesis 2:25.

The Jewish prophets were apparently commonly, naked so much so that when Saul stripped off his cloths and prophesied naked, the people figured he mug be a prophet also.¹ It must be a strange God indeed to use his vessel in a condemned state to bring His message to people.

If the state of public nakedness is prohibited by God, then the story of Isaiah² is even more strange. In that case, God directly commanded Isaiah to loose the sack cloth from his hips—and he went naked and barefoot for three years. It seems that your God cannot make up his mind; or maybe public nudity is acceptable for some people but not others. My God's laws are the same for everybody. .

Ezekiel's allegory pictures being naked and bare as a natural and totally acceptable state: "Your breasts were formed and your (pubic) hair had grown."³

The Song of Solomon is well known for its repeated appreciation of the naked body. I cannot understand why your God would several times use a state of sinfulness (i.e. nakedness) to depict His people in a proper relationship with Him.

Sexual intercourse is Scripturally ordained to be private and covered.⁴ I take "covered" to mean "not public."

Clothes and jewelry are a gift to enhance and increase one's beauty⁵, but never Scripturally required except for priests in the presence of the altar⁶ and for women during menstruation.

It is interesting that Noah was both drunk and naked in public view, but Ham—not Noah—was the one who was cursed when he called attention to Noah's nakedness.⁷ It seems that your God should have been pleased that Ham notified his brothers to cover Noah—and that Noah should have been the one punished. My God knows that both the clothed and the naked are natural states of being and that calling attention to, or making light of the body, is giving it a position not ordained by Him.

1 Cf. I Samuel 19:24,

2 CE Isaiah 20:2ff.

3 Ezekiel 16:7.

4 Cf. Ezekiel 16:8.

5 Cf. Ezekiel 16:10-14.

6 Cf. Exodus 28:42.

7 Cf. Genesis 9:22-24.

While on the subject of drunkenness and nudity, the Bible clearly states that it is wrong to get a person drunk to be able to view his nakedness¹.

Frankly, I think you are on very dangerous ground with your negative view of social nudity. King David danced naked in the City of David to celebrate the return of the ark. When his wife, Michal, criticized his dancing publicly in the nude, she was soundly rebuffed and ended up childless until her death.² How can your God be pleased with a joyful dance before Himself by one in a condemned state of nakedness? And all the maidens saw him!³ And why did God make Michal barren (I assume you believe fertility is determined by God) when she was merely espousing your God's point of view regarding social or public nudity? Your attitude today seems to be strikingly similar to Michal's many centuries ago; I would tremble if I had your attitude before my God.

Although some try to say Peter had underwear on, the probability is that he fished in the nude.⁴ At least every other person in the New Testament who had his outer garments removed was left naked.⁵

Every Biblical association of nakedness with shame is in reference to a sin already committed. This is because one cannot hide from God behind literal or figurative clothes. God will remove whatever one uses to cover his sins, to expose a person as that person really is, i.e. "naked." All man-made excuses (for sin) will be removed. But this does not refer to physical nakedness.⁶

Historically, the early Christians were baptized in the nude, a fact conveniently ignored by today's church.

One statement I heard recently left me outraged at the open, callused deception practiced by many evangelicals.

The statement that Leviticus 18:6-19 is God's law regarding the state of being unclothed, is either utterly irresponsible

1Cf Habakdoug 2:15,

2Cf. 1 Samuel 6:20-23.

3CL. Ibid. v. 20.

4Cf John 21:7.

5cf Mark 14:51 & Acts 19:16.

6 e.g. cf. Ezekiel 23:29; Hosea 2:3 & Micah 1:8 & 11.

or outright lie. Every translation Other than the King James version recognizes this passage to refer not to nakedness, but to sexual intercourse. Evangelicals have a responsibility to make this clear, not to contort this into a condemnation of nudity even within the family.

This letter is not meant to imply that nakedness cannot be used for sinful purposes. The sin comes, not from the fact of being naked, but from how the state of nakedness is used. A dead body, although openly naked, cannot sin. "God saw all that He made, and behold, it was very good"¹ including human bodies. Some people choose desecrate it; others try to deny it; still others accept their bodies as God created them. The reason is simple. These people are able to distinguish between nudity and sexual activity. They know that the real" person lives within the body and that person Is much more interesting and stimulating than the person's body. This is how it should be because God created us as spiritual, intellectual, social as well as physical beings.² When one places so much emphasis (either positively or negatively) on the body he is really idolizing the body over the sacred person God created. There are those who idolize the mind, others who idolize social relationships, and many so-called evangelical *Christians" who idolize the spiritual.

Finally, one has to consider the question of lust. I believe the problem lies in a misunderstanding of the word. Lust is a desire so passionate or strong that it very nearly compels action, especially action that breaks one's accepted bounds of behavior. This is not to be confused with exhilaration or the feeling of enchantment, or exhilaration in nature. Most people never forget the feeling of joyful pleasure when they see Yosemite Valley for the first time, or the enchantment they experience while driving along much of the California coastline. Yet, who would come home from vacation saying they "lusted" over these natural beauties? In the same way, a man may, indeed probably will, get much the same sense of excitement when viewing the natural beauty of

a well proportioned female body. Such a feeling of pleasure or exhilaration, however, does not constitute lust, unless he is moved to

1Genesis 1:31,

2Luke 2:52 would suggest this.

take an action designed to result in a sexual union contrary to his Scriptural bounds of behavior. Mere appreciation, or even excitement at the wonder of the human body, is not lust. Lust begins when one is willing to start thinking of ways to sexually attract the other person in a union contrary to Scriptural morality.

I am comfortable spiritually with my open nudity because I know I am right with God and that I have nothing to hide from Him. Indeed, through Christ, I am returned spiritually to the same state Adam enjoyed in Eden. Because my heart (intention, desires) is right and my life is right before God, I choose not to pursue any of the sexual sins the Bible actually does condemn.

Last: I trust that you will study the more than fifty Scriptural references to nudity for your decision on public nakedness, and not rely on contortions of other Scriptural references that really don't address this subject.

Respectfully in Christ,
Paul M. Bowman