

Gospel-shaped Women

Part 1

1 Timothy 2:9-10

B.I: Women in God's household proclaim the excellencies of Christ by the unique qualities of modest dress and exemplary behavior which are precious to God.

LTS: Psalm 112

Today we come to the part of First Timothy where Paul begins speaking to the women of the church of church. You will remember that this was a church that started out well but false teaching had crept in and was threatening to unravel the beautiful tapestry of grace the H.S. had created. Paul had sent his young Protégé, Timothy, on a specific mission to this church; namely, to confront the false teaching and reinstruct the church on how believers should behave as members of the household of God.

This is a very relevant text for our time to say the least. Never has there been a season in western history where the general populace has been so consumed with gender issues. Of course for most of the past century there has existed what has been variously termed “the battle of the sexes” or the “Women’s Liberation Movement,” but today the battle for equality among the sexes is virtually dominating the collective conversation of our culture.

Frankly, it should not be surprising that this kind of conflict is raging in society. We understand that even in America – a country founded on biblical principles – that the idea of submission to the revealed will of God was jettisoned a long time ago. People want to do what they think is best for themselves. American individualism is grounded in the idea that everyone should get what they want when they want it and no one should be allowed to get in their way. This is a world where “self” rules: self ambition, self actualization, self gratification, and self glorification. So it shouldn’t be surprising to us that there is constant conflict between the sexes.

James explains this clearly when he writes in James 4,

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You lust and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

And this is what we see in our society. Everyone wants what they want and they are willing to fight to get it. So it’s not surprising that the “Battle of the Sexes” rages in society. The real surprise is when it rears its ugly head in the church.

Over the years you have heard me say things like, “We don’t know how to pray until God teaches us through his word. We don’t know how to worship until God’s word teaches us to worship. And it is also true that we don’t know how men and women are to function with one another in the household of God until God’s word teaches us. The wonderful thing, however, is that that word of God does teach us how men and women – male and female – members of the

body of Christ are to relate to one another. And its teaching is not merely for husbands and wives but for men and women (and young men and women) in general. The word of God is even sufficient for this.

For the past 30 years or so, however, some who call themselves conservative evangelical Christians have begun taking what the word of God says about men and women and reforming it to better reflect the values of our day. This perspective is called Evangelical Feminism, and it has caused significant strife in the church. Even in our little church there have been some who came to a place where they eventually decided they could no longer worship with us because of their newly discovered understanding of evangelical feminism.

Now, I realize there is no way that I am going to reverse the tide of Christian culture on this issue by preaching a couple sermons out of First Timothy. Nevertheless, like Timothy, God has put me (and the other elders) in this church with a mission; namely, to teach the whole counsel of God and to set right what has drifted into error. And this is indeed what Paul has sent Timothy to do in the church of Ephesus.

Now as we come to the next section of the first letter to Timothy Paul has already addressed the men in chapter one. They were guilty of being divisive. The false teaching was coming from the men so Paul instructs Timothy to bring the word of God to bear on the situation for the purpose of correction. In 2:8 he concludes his exhortation about the men by saying, I desire, then, that in every place [probably every house church], the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.”

Now, in verses 9-15 he transitions from divisive men to distractive women. Notice how Paul says (9) “likewise also...” This phrase points back to the first words of verses 8, where Paul says “I desire.” This is from the word *Bulemai* which is the desire of command. Paul is speaking with the full authority of an apostle. He is saying I desire (or “I command”) that men should give up their anger and arguing and with holy hands and a unified fellowship, pray.

In verse 9 then he says, “Likewise also the women...” In other words, as I have addressed concerns about the men in the body when the church gathers, so I have instruction for the women as well. The men tended to hinder worship by causing division. On the other hand, the women sometimes hindered worship by causing a distraction. How were they causing a distraction to worship? Two ways: first, by the way they dressed. Second, by their insistence on teaching. This morning we will only have time to cover the first of these and then next week perhaps we can finish the second.

Read 1 Timothy 2:8-15

Now you know that since the beginning of our study we have been trying to learn what it means to live a gospel-shaped life. Paul is now focused on how the women of the church can live in such a way that demonstrates that they have been and are being changed by the powerful grace of God. I see two primary issues in verses 9-10 pertaining to women in the church.

- I. The Attitudes of the Gospel-shaped Woman
- II. The Attire of the Gospel-shaped Woman

I. The Attitude of the Gospel-shaped Woman (9)

1. Apparently, the false teaching in the church of Ephesus was having an effect upon the women. The nature of the false teaching probably was related to the kind of false doctrine that had already gained a foothold in Corinth.

- A. Philip Towner suggests that the problem Paul is dealing with in the Pastoral epistles (1 & 2 Tim, Titus) was a kind of over-realized eschatology. More specifically, they may have adopted the notion that falsely said the promised resurrection had already come in a kind of spiritual way.¹ After all, Paul himself said that we are raised with Christ.
- B. We know from Titus 2:18 that Hymenaeus was one of the men who were teaching that the resurrection had already come. And he is one of the two men Paul just mentioned in 1 Tim. 1:20 whom he had “handed over to Satan that they would learn not to blaspheme.”
- C. This kind of teaching might explain why these teachers had a low view of marriage (after all, Jesus taught that there is no marriage in heaven). It might also account for the emancipation of women from established norms.
- D. We know from the Pastoral Epistles that
 - some women were asserting themselves into teaching roles that were not for them.
 - Some were choosing not to marry, not because they had the gift of singleness but because they wanted their freedom. Because of this, instead of taking care of their home and children (1 Tim. 5:13) they were idle and had become busy-bodies and gossips.
 - Some were misusing their liberties relative to drinking wine, and some had become enslaved to it (Tit. 2:3 suggests).
 - Others who had initially made a pledge to serve the Lord by their singleness had been overcome with lust and had turned their back on Christ (1 Tim. 5:11-12)

2. In any case, some of the women in the church were being led astray and that was apparent by the way they were dressing when they attended the gatherings for worship. So Paul says, “Likewise also the women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel. The word for “Respectable” here refers to a kind of clothing that signals a person’s special status.

- A. The gospel-shaped woman dresses in such a way that is consistent with the biblical truth that she is an adopted daughter of the King. She is “in Christ” and that status should not be betrayed by the clothing that she wears.
- B. By the way, the word for “adorn” is the GK verb *Kosmios* from which we get our

¹ Andreas Kostenberger and Thomas Schriener, *Women In The Church*, (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 2016), 171

word cosmetics. It means “to arrange,” “to put in order,” or “to make ready.” Paul is not telling Christian women that they shouldn’t put on makeup or do something nice with their hair. He is simply encouraging women to think about what your appearance will say about your love for Christ and His people. Your identity as a daughter of the King should have a bearing on how you dress.

- C. Nevertheless, as with every issue the Bible speaks to, sin and righteousness are always matters of the heart. Paul’s primary concern was not their external attire but their internal attitudes of the heart that controlled what they chose to wear. C.J. Mahaney says, “Any biblical discussion on modesty must address the heart not the hemline.”²

3. You see, ladies, your personal wardrobe is a personal and private statement about your motivation. And if you are a follower of Jesus Christ your motive should be distinct from that of the world. And this text suggests two such motives: Modesty, and Self-control.

A. Modesty (or Propriety):

- 1) Modesty is the avoiding of clothing and adornment that is extravagant, showy, revealing, or sexually enticing. As C.J. Mahaney cautions, [Immodesty] “is much more than wearing a low cut skirt or dress. It is an expression of arrogance. It reveals an absence of humility. It is the act of attracting undue attention to yourself. Modesty is humility expressed in dress. A desire to serve others (particularly men) and not promote or provoke sensuality or lust.”

B. Self Control (“discreetly”):

- 1) Means restraint, moderation for the purpose of purity.

4. Ladies, I think its safe to say that these attitudes toward dress are foreign to the typical female shopper at Ridglea or Hulen Malls. And it is certainly foreign to those who rule the American fashion industry. But Paul is calling for something more – something better from you and for your brothers and sisters in Christ with whom you worship.

5. Paul knew what it was like to live in a godless culture. Ephesus was the home of the great temple of Atrimis. Discussing the kinds of immorality that went on as part of the worship of this goddess are not becoming for a worship service where Christ is supreme. “In our day, we may not have a Temple of Artemis in our city but we are extremely loose in our culture when it comes to what women wear. Skintight clothes. Low necklines short dresses. Short skirts short shorts. All of which fall short of the biblical ideal for modesty and self-control.”³

6. Let me ask you a few modesty questions:

- A. What statement does your wardrobe make about your heart? Is says something about who you are and what you value most. What does it say?

² C. J. Mahaney, *The Soul of Modesty*, (audio message).

³ David Platt

- B. Is you shopping for clothes and purchase of clothes informed and governed by self control. As Mahaney asks, “Do you take God to the Gap?”
 - C. In choosing clothes for this morning whose attention did you desire and whose approval do you crave? Did you carefully consider whether your clothing choices would be worthy of your status as a daughter of God?
7. Gospel-shaped women have God-shaped attitudes about what they wear.

II. The Attire of the Gospel-shaped Woman

1. Paul says (9) not with braided hair and gold and pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness.”
2. Now clearly Paul is not prohibiting women from enhancing her beauty. The Prov. 31 woman wore clothing that was colorful. Lydia was a seller of purple cloth. I suspect she used some of that to make herself presentable. There’s nothing wrong with that.
3. Paul does, however, have a specific concern. The phrase “costly attire” points to the problem. Some of the women dressed in such a way that flaunted their wealth. In fact, it can be demonstrated historically that many women in the upper echelons of society would spend hours and hours plaiting their hair with gold and pearls and jewels. When they came to a banquet or ball they appeared to have their entire fortune weaved together on their head!
4. The restriction here is clear. Don’t come to worship service with clothing that is chosen to draw attention to your wealth. Don’t do things with your hair that will draw people’s attention to you.

I remember as a child seeing a catalogue my mother was flipping through and there was a female model walking down the fashion runway with a rather odd looking dress and a hat that had a life-size, artificial pineapple sitting on top. I always think of that when I read these verses. Ladies, you wouldn’t come to church with a pineapple on your head. So don’t come with crazy hair and gaudy jewelry, or anything else that would draw attention to you wealth. It will cause everyone to look at you, and talk about you (and some of the talk will not be flattering!).

5. Rather, dress in a manner that (10) “is proper for women who profess godliness – with good works.” In other words, let your real beauty be the godly attitudes and deeds people see in your life.

6. 1 Peter 3:3-7

- A. Beauty is not primarily external but internal (imperishable) “Charm is

deceitful and beauty is vain, but the woman who fears the Lord will be praised” (Prov. 31:30)

- B. The hidden person of the heart (4)
- C. Gentleness and quietness(4)
- D. These are attractive to men (1-2)
- E. These are precious to God (v. 4)
- F. Peter’s teaching helps us understand Paul’s instruction on braids, gold, and pearls. Paul’s purpose is not to ban these things altogether but to warn against expensive and extravagant preoccupation with one’s appearance.⁴

7. Ladies, let me be honest and practical with you for a moment. I don’t think women in our church usually fall into the error of an ostentatious display of wealth. Rather, on occasion the other category of immodest - sensual dress - can be a problem. And I think for the most part when it happens the problem is ignorance and unawareness rather than a desire to seduce or distract.

8. I think many Christian women (especially young women) are not aware of what the Scriptures teach about how to dress as a woman of God. Just as in every other essential area of life and godliness, God has spoken about how you are to dress.

9. The other thing that I think many women are simply unaware of is the effect immodesty has on the men of the church. You need to understand that all week long Christian men are at war with the lust of the flesh. Everywhere we turn in this hyper-sexualized culture we know we will have to fight for “a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.” We don’t have to go looking for sinful sensuality. It comes to us like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

10. But when we come to church, our desire is to worship God in Spirit and Truth. We want to worship Christ in the one place in all the world (besides our homes) where women are not flaunting their form and wearing things that are designed to attract the attention of men

11. I have a friend who says, “When I go to church I sometimes want to say to certain women, “I have come to this place to worship Christ – not you!”

12. So ladies, my appeal to you is an appeal to love. You remember the definition of love: “To love is to give what I have that you need because God wants me to.” And I just want to tell you on behalf of the men and young men of this church that the best way to love us when you are preparing for church is to dress in a manner that frees us to worship Christ rather than drawing our attention to you.

- Some of you young single ladies are probably hoping that someday a

⁴ Kostenberger & Schreiner, 192

godly young man will come along whom you can marry and enjoy a wonderful life with.

- You should know that godly young men are not attracted to young women who dress immodestly. They tend to RUN from them! They tend to stay as far away as possible because! That is not the kind of girl they are looking for. Focus on being the godliest young lady you can be by the grace of God. Be God's kind of woman, and in His timing perhaps He will lead you to that godly young man.

13. Now, having said that let me temper this message a bit. First of all, the only reason we are talking about this topic this morning is because it is clearly on the mind of the apostle in these verses. As a minister of Christ it is my duty to preach the whole counsel of God. I would be an unfaithful pastor if I did not preach this passage and the one that follows.

14. Second, I want to say how blessed I am to serve in this church where so many of our women delight to live in obedience to these texts. I know that I can say that on behalf of the elders and so many of the men in this congregation: we praise God for the heart God has given you to seek to please the Lord even in the way that you dress. So many of you are committed to do the hard work it takes in this culture to find things to wear that are both beautiful and modest. And by doing so your profession of godliness is evidenced by your good works.

15. I have spoken with men who have visited this church who went out of their way to tell me how blessed they were to walk through those doors for worship and discovered – much to their surprise - a real church rather not a female fashion show. Ladies, the love and care that you show us by the way you dress may often go unspoken, but it does not go unnoticed. So, on behalf of the men in this church I say thank you.

16. Now, on more thought before we close. I have quoted Pastor C.J. Mahaney more than once in this message and I want to do so one more time: As a pastor,

- A. I want this to be a church where women motivated by grace and love for their brothers in Christ, dress modestly for the glory of God.
- B. I also want this to be a church where the immodest unconverted can come and be warmly welcomed and not self-righteously judged.
- C. I want this to also be a church where the newly-converted, immature, and even the mature if immodestly dressed, would be cared for through gracious correction. On this issue the older women should be faithful to instruct the younger. Modesty is the obligation of the whole church.

B.I: Women in God's household proclaim the excellencies of Christ by the unique qualities of modest dress and exemplary behavior which are precious to God.