

1 Timothy 2:8-15 “What Does Modesty Look Like?” (August 28, 2011)
2 Kings 9
Psalm 45

Read 2 Kings 9

Any discussion of modesty and adornment in the Bible should start with Jezebel.

When we looked at Paul’s statement regarding himself as “chief of sinners”
we looked at Jezebel’s husband – Ahab –
who is quite possibly the worst sinner in the OT
(1 Kings 21:25 “There was none who sold himself to do what was evil
in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited.”).

When I preached through Kings I argued that Ahab’s father Omri
was the antichrist of the OT.

Everything we know about Omri is parallel to David in some way.

Omri was general for the previous king (the house of Baasha) –
just like David was general for the previous king (Saul).

Omri reigned over part of Israel for a few years – just like David.

[Indeed, Jezebel’s reference to “Zimri, murderer of his master”
refers back to how Zimri killed the king, Elah,

and Omri – Jezebel’s father-in-law –

had brought justice to Zimri by overthrowing him.

In other words, Jezebel seeks to “curse” Jehu

by comparing him to the ill-fated Zimri – who reigned only 7 days]

Also, Omri first had his capital in Tirzah,

but then moved it to Samaria – a city he had built –

just like David had moved from Hebron to Jerusalem.

What is more,

Omri’s son, Ahab, built a temple for Baal in Samaria –

just as Solomon, David’s son, built a temple for Yahweh in Jerusalem.

And Omri’s son, Ahab, was led astray by Jezebel – the Sidonian princess –

just as Solomon, David’s son, was led astray by foreign wives.

So Omri is an “anti-David” and Ahab is an “anti-Solomon” –
the house of Omri is “anti-Christ.”

This attitude is reflected in the book of Revelation which refers to “Jezebel”
as encouraging sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols.

In the same way that Omri and Ahab are antichrist –

Jezebel is anti-church.

She is the one who dresses herself up in great finery –

but she is a harlot – she is the woman Folly of Proverbs 9.

Jezebel is not evil because she paints her eyes and adorns herself.

She is evil because she knows how to use her womanly arts to seduce and destroy.
She adorns herself to manipulate – to exert power and control.
[we'll come back to this]

But before we talk about the “dark side”, let us look upon the light!

Psalm 45 speaks of a woman arrayed in gold and gems and glorious garments.
Her beauty is for the king – and for him alone –
but all the nations behold it.
She bows to him alone –
but all the nations seek her favor –

and particularly the people of Tyre.

Why Tyre?

Certainly we must remember Hiram of Tyre –
the faithful king of Tyre who helped David and Solomon.
But we must not forget Jezebel –
the daughter of the king of Tyre!
[he is referred to as the “king of the Sidonians” in 1 Kings 16 –
but Tyre and Sidon were one nation].

Psalm 45 speaks of a woman who is absolutely stunning.
One might say she is extravagantly dressed –
but you could only say that if you are an egalitarian republican.
Anyone else who dressed this way – in gold and gems and glorious garments –
would be extravagantly dressed –
would be dressed beyond her station in life –

but she is the princess!

And as the bride of the king – she uses her adornment *publicly* to give glory to her bridegroom.
She knows how to use her womanly arts for the glory of her husband.

I know that in our egalitarian culture we don't like to hear this,
but Paul says that “woman is the glory of man.” (1 Cor 11:7)

Wives,

your appearance – your adornment – is to glorify your husband.
We see this at weddings – with that radiant bride who illumines the whole building –
but do we think about how this works in the rest of married life?
[And as Psalm 45 suggests – our bridegroom is truly Christ!]

Sing Psalm 45

Read 1 Timothy 2

Paul says in 3:14-15

“I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay,
you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God,
which is the church of the living God,
a pillar and buttress of the truth.” (3:14-15)

Over the next two weeks we will look at what Paul says regarding women in the church –
first, “what does modesty look like?” from verses 8-10,
and then, “what does quietness sound like?” from verses 11-15.

We will come back to the question of deaconesses in a couple weeks in chapter 3,
and then the roll of widows in chapter 5 –
so there will be quite a bit of discussion about women in the church this fall!
Or, should I say “gender” in the church? –
because there will also be quite a bit about *men* as well.

Indeed, verse 8 begins with an address to *men* –
not to “people” in general,
but to men in particular.

The Greek word here is *andros* – which means men as distinct from women
(the general word for humanity is *anthropos*, which was used in 2:1 and 2:5).

1. Men Should Pray without Anger or Quarreling (v8)

8 I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

Verses 8 and 9 run in parallel:

Paul uses one main verb: “I desire”
to go with two infinitives,
“I desire men...to pray;
likewise women...to adorn”

And on both sides of the parallel there are both positive and negative statements:
men should pray, “lifting holy hands,”
women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel –
and especially with good works;
men should not pray with anger or quarreling,
women should not adorn themselves with braided hair, gold, pearls, etc.

I know – you all are more interested in what I’m going to say about the second part!
But you need to pay attention to the first part as well!

Paul desires that in every place – in South Bend, as well as Ephesus –
men (males) should pray,
lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.

We often think that men's biggest problem is lust.
In fact, we have become so obsessed with sexual issues,
that I fear we have become less sensitive to the problem that Paul warns against here.

Anger and quarreling.

Men, do you have trouble with your temper?
Do you use anger to exert power and control?
Does your wife have to "tread carefully" when you are in certain "moods"?
Paul says that anger (or wrath) pollutes your hands,
and soils your prayers.

But he also says that "quarreling" (or disputing) pollutes your hands.
This word is also used in Philippians 2, when Paul says to do all things
"without grumbling or questioning" –
reminding us of the wilderness generation
that grumbled and quarreled in the wilderness.
Paul *always* uses this word negatively.

The church should not be characterized by disputes and debates;
Paul considers that to be just as bad as anger.
Rather, men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.

How can you tell the difference between a good discussion and contentious disputing?
It's simple, really.
How well can you pray together afterwards?
Did your discussion draw you closer to God and each other?
Or did it push you further apart?

I remember a particularly difficult debate and vote at the OPC General Assembly a few years ago
That evening commissioners from both sides of the issue
joined together at a local watering hole.
We had sweet fellowship together.
Our prayers were not hindered by our differences.

But I will add this note:
we all had to *work* at it!

Christ calls us to be of *one mind*.
And so when we differ – when we disagree with each other –
there is something wrong!
In most cases probably *both of us* are wrong!
Probably both of us are failing to see clearly.

It is not that I am right, and I need to argue you into my position!
Rather, we both need to humbly seek the Word of God.

Paul's admonition here particularly focuses on *men*.

That doesn't mean that it's okay for women to be angry and quarrelsome!
Rather, Paul is focusing on a particular area of concern.

He sees that men tend to have a problem with anger and disputing –
and he urges you – men – to pray, lifting holy hands.

What does it mean to lift “holy hands”?

The context here suggests public prayer.

In the OT this posture is frequently used in prayer.

I will not say that this posture is *required* in prayer,

but it would be good for you to lift your hands in prayer.

It puts your body in a stance of dependence upon God,
with your hands uplifted to him.

But as Paul suggests in his choice of the word “holy” (or pious),
the posture alone is not sufficient.

Israel had thought that as long as they went through the outward motions,
God would hear their prayers.

But the outward is not irrelevant!

Paul says that you must lift *holy hands* in prayer, without anger or quarreling.

And you must do this in “every place.”

The idea of “every place” indicates the places where the church gathers.

We saw last time that Paul urges that prayers be made for all men,
and especially for rulers;

that all humanity might come to the knowledge of the truth.

Now he urges the men to raise holy hands in prayer in every place
without anger or quarreling.

But what about the women?

Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel.

It's worth noting that when Paul brings up the question of women in the church,
he starts with their physical appearance.

(cf. 1 Corinthians 11)

In some respects, not much has changed – women's physical appearance remains a hot topic!

2. Women Should Adorn Themselves...with Good Works (v9-10)

But I started us with 2 Kings 9 and Psalm 45 in order to remind us

that the biblical world was also rather different from the modern world.

In the ancient world – indeed until the last few decades –

the question of “modesty” in dress depended in a large degree on your station in life.

If you are the queen, then your *simplest* dress would be more elaborate and costly
than the *most* extravagant dress in an ordinary woman's closet.

Sixteenth-century Reformed pastors encouraged their congregations to
“dress according to their station” –
on the premise that each person should be content with their lot,
and so to dress above your station would be presumptuous,
and to dress below your station would be false humility.

In other words, for most of human history,
your clothing communicated something about *your status* and station in life.
Today, clothing is far more about individual self-expression –
with the irony that marketers encourage you to “express yourself”
by looking like someone else!

But I spent some time on the exhortation to men in verse 8
in order that you might see the parallel here:
just as men are encouraged to engage in an outward action (lifting holy hands)
as an expression of an inward disposition,
so also a woman’s outward appearance and actions
are to express her inward godliness.

a. Outward Appearance (v9)

*9 likewise also that women should adorn themselves [kosmeo] in respectable [kosmios] apparel,
with modesty [aidos] and self-control [sophrosune], not with braided hair and gold or pearls or
costly attire,*

The verb *kosmeo* and its related adjective *kosmios* appears in 1 Timothy 2:9 and 3:2.
We get our word “cosmetics” from the Greek “kosmeo” –
which is often translated “to adorn.”
The adjective, “kosmios” means well-ordered or properly adorned.
“Respectable” works well –
especially since the same word is used to describe the bishop in 3:2.
Paul says that the same word that should describes a woman’s apparel
also works well for describing a bishop’s character.

The two other words used here are “modesty and self-control.”
These two words (*aidos* and *sophrosyne*)
are frequently paired together in Greek discussions of character and sexuality –
both masculine and feminine.
Many Greeks believed that women were incapable of “*aidos*” (modesty)
and required external controls to “protect” them.

Paul’s attitude is quite different.
Paul says that women are indeed capable of modesty and self-control
and that such modesty and self-control should be displayed both in outward attire
and in outward actions.

In light of tendencies both in Greek and in Jewish thought to put external restraints on women,
it is instructive that Paul says
that women themselves are to exercise modesty and *self*-control.

Philo, a contemporary of Jesus, commended one Jewish sect
for designing their assemblies in such a way that the women sat on one side of a screen
so that their “modesty” would be preserved.
But Paul does not pursue that approach.

In fact, Paul does not appear to be especially concerned
with the sexual component of modesty and self-control.

When he describes modesty and self-control, he says:
not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,

Some people have argued that these references have to do with what prostitutes wore.
Certainly, it is true that high-priced courtesans – the prostitutes for the wealthy –
dressed in this manner –
but it would be misleading to suggest
that Paul merely condemns dressing like a prostitute.
No Christian woman should dress like a prostitute,
but Christian women are not usually tempted to dress like prostitutes!
And in Paul’s day *many other* women wore braided hair, gold, pearls and costly attire!
These things were not limited to prostitutes!

And this is where the parallel to verse 8 comes in so handy!
Paul seems to think that the need for modesty and self-control in women’s apparel
is parallel to men’s tendency toward anger and quarreling.
In the same way that men tend to use anger to exert control over others –
so also, women tend to use clothing to exert power as well.

After all, it is especially women who *notice* what other women wear!
(I once asked the teenagers in Sunday school to close their eyes,
and tell me what the other teens were wearing.
The boys frequently couldn’t even remember the color of someone else’s clothes;
the girls could recount in great specificity
what virtually everyone else in the room was wearing!)

You see, the opposite of “modest” is not “sexy” but “extravagant.”
And extravagant depends (to some degree) on one’s station in life.
Paul says that Christian women should not engage in displays of wealth and high fashion
(braided hair, gold, pearls, costly attire).

Paul’s target is not skirt length – but designer labels!

In Paul's day there was quite a market for "accessories" – jewelry, make-up, belts, etc. The word for "braided hair" indicates a very elaborate hairdo – not just a simple braid.

Paul warns that Christian women should not be obsessed with fashion.

Rather, they should wear "respectable apparel" rather than "expensive clothes."

Paul will use the same word "respectable" to refer to the character of the bishop (or overseer) in 3:2.

[I appreciate that the ESV brings this out in its translation!]

Paul is saying that a woman's clothing should be like the character of the bishop: respectable, modest, well-ordered – in other words, not extravagant!

Greek and Roman men fight and quarrel.

Christian men should not.

Greek and Roman women obsess over style and appearance.

Christian women should not.

An awful lot of modern discourse about "modesty" focuses on encouraging women to dress "modestly" in order to avoid "provoking" men's lust.

You can find many Greek and Roman and Jewish writers who condemn women's attire as the cause of men's lust.

But the scriptures do not!

The scriptures condemn *men* as the cause of men's lust.

Jesus says that that which is outside you cannot defile you.

"But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person." (Matthew 15:18)

Certainly, no Christian woman should be dressing to "entice" other men (that would be an example of something "evil" coming out of your heart!).

You should treat other men as brothers – and only seek to "entice" your husband (as Proverbs 5 encourages you!).

So what does Paul mean by saying that women should adorn themselves *not* with braided hair, gold or pearls, or costly attire?

He means what he says!

He means that just as Christian men should not be characterized by anger and quarrelsomeness in their outward conduct,

so also Christian women should not be characterized by extravagance in clothing and adornment.

I've seen a number of comments on this verse that suggest that it's okay for Christian women to adorn themselves with braided hair, gold, pearls, or costly attire – so long as they don't dress like a prostitute.

This totally misses Paul's point.

Paul's point is that church should not be a fashion show.

It is not primarily a point about how much money you spend

(if you buy extravagant clothing at a yard sale – the clothing is still extravagant!).

Your clothing should be respectable (well-ordered)

(just like my character should be respectable – well-ordered).

(Remember that the word “respectable” in verse 9

is the same word that is found in the overseer's character list in 3:2)

That may not sound helpful at first.

But your clothing should look like your pastor's character.

Or put it the other way around, if you like:

what would it mean if my character looked like your wardrobe?

Is your clothing moderate? or is it extreme?

(And I'm not asking, “for first century standards”

since you don't live in the first century!)

In the 21st century, is your clothing moderate, or is it extravagant?

(And don't compare yourselves to Hollywood fashions –

we're talking about your station in life, here!)

When people see you, they should see your modesty and self-control –

the very things that Greco-Roman culture doubted that women could possess!

Do you have the self-control to say “I don't need to look hip”?

But, in that very exercise of modesty and self-control,

everyone should see in you a glimpse of that radiant bride of Psalm 45!

In Psalm 45 there are two dynamics at work:

1) “the king will desire your beauty” (v11a) – she has a certain power over her husband!

2) “since he is your lord, bow to him” (v11b) – she also submits to him.

And therefore, the nations come to seek her favor – because she is the queen!

All Ginger has to do is smile at me, and I melt.

There is a fascinating dynamic between beauty and submission –

all of which can be manifested in a woman's outward appearance.

Of course, it cannot truly be exhibited in a woman's clothing,

unless it is first present in her heart – and in her actions.

That’s why Paul says in verse 10:

b. Outward Action (v10)

[women should adorn themselves] *10 but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.*

Given Paul’s lengthy discussion about the relationship between faith and works in Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and elsewhere, you can be certain that he means the same thing by good works here as there!

As he wrote to the Ephesians:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Eph 2:8-10)

We are not saved *by* good works – but *for* good works.

And now he writes to the *pastor* of the church at Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3) that women who profess godliness should adorn themselves with good works.

Your good works are what should adorn you – they are what make you look beautiful!

Peter uses the same language in 1 Peter 3:1-5.

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 3 Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. 5 For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves [kosmeo], by submitting to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

Jezebel and her daughters seek to make themselves look beautiful through extravagant adornments, in order to get what they want.

Peter says, “let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart.”

Your gentle and quiet spirit is where you reveal an imperishable beauty.

We live in a culture that is obsessed with outward adornments – with physical beauty that fades and withers with age.

I know a woman whose “outward adornments” are not very impressive.
But over thirty years of marriage have revealed in her
a beauty that will never fade as long as she lives! (or after!)

Peter says that the holy women who hoped in God
adorned themselves “by submitting to their own husbands.”

What does submission mean?

It requires “self-control”!

It’s not your husband’s job to make you submit.

Nowhere in scripture is a husband commanded to make his wife submit.

It’s simply *not* in his job description.

His job is to love you!

Submission is your job.

If you fail to submit to him,

then he has one of two options:

- 1) he can love you anyway
- 2) he can get angry with you (and soil his own hands!)
(and that will be his fault – not yours!)

Conclusion

So, women, what does modesty look like?

Think about “modesty” in terms of the parallel that Paul has established.

In the same way that men can use anger and quarreling to exert power;
women can use clothing to exert power.

And in the same way that Paul calls men to repent of trying to use your temper to control others,
Paul calls women to repent of trying to exert power over others by how you dress!

As I’ve read some of the recent literature on “modesty” by Christian women,

I’ve been struck that some say that

“we can start a new fashion trend of modest clothing”

It’s ironic.

Because it is precisely that *attitude* that Paul condemns.

The whole point of modesty and self-control –

the whole point of respectable, well-ordered apparel,

is that you are not trying to exert power over others by how you dress!

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus –
that though he was in the form of God,

he did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped,

but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form,

he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

(Philippians 2:5-8)