

Women in the Church

1 Timothy 2:8-15

This morning we are resuming our study through Paul's letter to Timothy, pastor to the church at Ephesus. In the first chapter of this letter Paul set out to defend "sound gospel doctrine" (1:10-11) against the divisive, self-righteous teachers of strange doctrine. In chapter two, Paul reasserts the gospel as a message produces godly, praying people who are not divisive. In our concluding passage in chapter two, Paul addresses some of the specific disruptions in the church calling our attention to godliness/holiness, especially as it relates to women. So, we'll spend a considerable amount of time on feminine godliness. In chapter 3 men will get their fair share of attention. These verses contain some hotly debated issues, none of which we will adequately cover this morning. However, I do hope to shed some light on the various misinterpretations of these verses, while also explaining Paul's intention, namely that gospel doctrine so flood the church that women would be awash in godliness. We will be looking at feminine godliness in three ways: 1) Beauty in Appearance 2) Beauty in Spirit 3) Beauty in Action.

Gender Godliness

Paul writes: "I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrel; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire" (2:8-9). It was George Bernard Shaw who called the Apostle Paul the "eternal enemy of women." Was he correct? Was Paul a 1st century chauvinist who sought to oppress women? A surface reading of our text certainly seems to indicate so! That Paul expected women to be homely, silent, barefoot and pregnant! The challenge, however, is to get beneath the surface of the text to understand its true meaning. It is important that we situate this text within its historical context so we read the meaning *out of the text* not our meaning *into the text*. What was happening in the Ephesian church? The opening verses of the letter remind us that certain men were stirring up strife in the church. Combative teachers were teaching things contrary to the teachings of the apostles, distorting feminine and masculine identity in Christ. It is natural, then, that we find Paul exhorting the men of the church to not pray in anger or in quarrelling. The picture here is a gathering of the church, probably in a large house, one of the many house churches of Ephesus, where during the time of prayer men were steaming over the divisive, self-righteous, teachers who were spouting bad doctrine and stirring things up. Instead of charging them to enter into the public quarrel and public, Paul encourages them to *pray*, as was the Jewish custom, lifting up holy hands. Holy because they should seek reconciliation before worshipping. So pray, but don't pray in anger. Be peace-making men in church gatherings, in City Groups and Fight Clubs. Now, notice that he says that he wants men to pray in "every place." This could be a reference to all the house churches in Ephesus or it could be prayer everywhere. It is probably both given the previous exhortation to pray for all men. So, men, as we move into the message that is largely concerned with feminine godliness I want you, not to make a list of areas where your wife has failed (that is judgmental and self-righteous). Instead, take this as an opportunity to pray and ask God how you can better lead your wife, how you can promote her beauty. Under your leadership your wives should grow in beauty of spirit, demeanor, action. Pray for your wives. If you are single, pray and look for women like this.

Beauty of Appearance

So we have established the context—the people in the Ephesian church are experiencing strife, not only as men but also as women. Addressing the women, Paul writes: “likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire.” Just as men are to be godly in their prayers so also women are to be godly in their approach to beauty. In these verses Paul addresses the Beauty of Appearance. Appearance is a big deal in our culture. Some of you are so obsessed with it that it’s what you wake up and go to bed thinking about—what will I wear tomorrow? You face the terrible trial each morning of deciding what you will wear! In order to stay up with the latest fashions, you accumulate more clothes than you need, facing down the dreaded enemy of “having nothing to wear”, while possessing plenty to wear. It’s difficult in our culture to be content with your appearance, to not be obsessed, because we receive a thousand messages a day that tell us to buy more so we can truly be beautiful. Have you seen the Oakley sunglasses billboard around town with Karena Dawn running with a pair of \$130 shades on? The billboard reads “Perform beautifully.” That says it all. The beauty of appearance in our culture is a competition. You are up against supermodels and airbrushed women. The principle driving beauty is a principle of performance. Will you perform beautifully—will you run with \$130 shades on or settle for \$10 shades. The latter is for the loser. Women are dominated by the principle of performance, competing against one another for the title of beautiful. And when you fail to be fashionable, you fail to be beautiful—a great lie from the pit of marketing hell. Chelsea Handler was in town this weekend, the X-rated female comedian who has written two best-sellers. In her recent, *Chelsea, Chelsea, Bang, Bang*, Chelsea bemoans her own struggles to perform: “My parents couldn’t have been more unreasonable when it came to fads or clothes that weren’t purchased at a pharmacy.” “Every time a new fad came along, a little of myself died inside. How sad, not that her parents were unreasonable (who knows whether or not to take Chelsea seriously), but that she felt like a little part of her died inside when she was denied a new fad. Beauty by performance will kill you, slowly but surely, by subverting true beauty and placing your emphasis on superficial beauty. What is the biblical alternative to Beauty of Appearance? In this passage, Paul offers a principle and some practices. The practices are straightforward—no braided hair with gold and pearls! This isn’t a prohibition of braids, but of braids laced with extravagance, i.e. gold and pearls. The key issue is extravagant dress, “costly attire.” Some of the clothing of the day went for 7000 denarii, which amounted to about 19 yrs of average day labor. Extravagant hairdos were promoted by elite, imperial women who laced their braids with wealth to show off their status. These practices were trickling down in Greco-Roman culture, with regular women imitating them. Church gatherings were becoming a competition in external beauty, and as a result they were distracting attention from God as the focus of worship. This application of Paul’s principle for external beauty is historically and culturally conditioned. Braided bling is not an issue for Austin City Life women, but it may be for Dallas women. Are there any applications for ACL women? Certainly. Let’s locate them in the larger principle of external beauty. Paul says “women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control.” The principle is one of modesty and self-control. Are you dressing modestly, with propriety, or are you gliding along mindlessly wearing tight and low-cut fashion? Do you deliberately exercise a self-awareness when buying clothing, trying to avoid clothing that would entice men? Here’s a hint: what you catch them with is what you will lose them with. Catch them with sex-appeal and you will lose them to sex-appeal. Catch them with godliness and you will lose them to godliness, meaning you will actually benefit. So, to

summarize, Paul isn't universally and for all time condemning braided hair, gold jewelry, pearls, and designer clothing. These are historic applications of the universal principle of feminine godliness—*modesty and self-control*. However, it is just as incumbent upon 21st century women to cultivate godliness as it was for 1st century women. God is calling women to work godliness out in the challenges of their own culture, to adorn themselves “*with what is proper for women who profess godliness*,” not primarily with fashion and accessories but with modesty and self-control. Men, pray for your wives in this. It is very difficult to cultivate modesty and self-control in a culture of gross immodesty.

Beauty of Spirit

Transitioning from Beauty of Appearance to Beauty of Spirit, Paul writes: “**Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.**” Ahh, Paul the eternal enemy of women. Paul here turns his attention from appearance to spirit. The key word in these verses is the word “quietly,” which appears twice in 11-12. *Quietness* can refer to silence, and does 4xs in the NT (Lk 14:4; act 21:14; 22:4; 11:18), but another 4xs (1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:12; 1 Pet 3:4) it refers to a disposition, an internal state of the heart, “working quietly with your hands.” It does not mean that women can't talk because in 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul encourages women to pray and prophecy in church gatherings. 1 Peter 3:3-4 is a parallel passage, where Peter describes the godly woman as one who possesses “**an imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.**” Beauty, true attractiveness, is Beauty of Spirit. Beauty of Spirit refers to the disposition of a woman to not assert, demand, or gossip, but to support, serve, and edify. Chapter 5 informs us that there were women that were busybodies, gossips, and idlers. Apparently, they were going from house church to house church to spread the gossip. This is a loud spirit—it is destructive and self-centered spirit, finding significance in being in the know at the cost of others' reputation. Far from edifying. Fight Clubs and City Groups are not a place for gossip. Instead, ladies, you should make it your aim in Fight Clubs and City Groups to cultivate a quiet spirit, an inner godliness that is of an enduring, imperishable quality. A woman with a beautiful spirit will edify with her words, not destroy. Proverbs 15:3 tells us that the tongue of the wise is a tree of life, but the words of the fool break the spirit. The beautiful woman doesn't talk over her husband or anyone else for that matter. She does not assert but supports. Instead of always trying to get her point across, she tries to listen to other's points. She looks for ways to affirm and encourage in conversation. Her spirit and words are a tree of life. People pick from the fruit of her character and receive life. Are you this kind of woman? Where are you weak? Ask your husband, who is praying for you right now, to help you see how you can cultivate a quiet spirit. Go to your FC partner and ask her to be honest with you. Go after godliness (4:7). Cultivate imperishable beauty, but be careful you don't do this to impress God, yourself, or others. Beauty of Spirit is not a competition. God is not demanding that you “perform beautifully.” Rather, he's asking you to live beautifully, to walk out the very beauty he has already given to you in Christ. In 1 Timothy 6:11 he tells us: “**pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called...**” Take hold of the eternal life, the imperishable beauty purchased for you in Jesus and bring it right into the present by faith. Live out the beauty and life of Christ, not as a performance but as an act of worship!

Women & Authority

Now, another way this quiet spirit works out is in your disposition toward authority. Paul writes: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (13-14). Regarding authority in the church, Paul affirms the centrality of male authority and teaching. We’ll see in chapter three that elders, who lead the church, are to be *men* of one woman. Men are to lead the church in authority and through teaching. Every elder should be “able to teach. Conversely, women are not to have authority over men. This does not mean that women can’t lead. It simply means that they aren’t to hold authoritative positions over men. At ACL, we really value women, which is why we have female staff, deacons, worship leaders, and teachers. We believe it is important to empower women in ministry, but none of these women exercise authority over men. If I can brag for a moment, on this particular point Miranda and Kristin are exemplary. They are conscious of this text and faithfully walk the fine line of leading us in various areas of ministry without asserting authority over men. They are humble servants. But what’s the big deal with women teaching and having authority over men? Is this Paul’s chauvinism peaking out? Not at all. Look at his reasoning, v.14: *For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.* “For” indicates the basis for Paul’s instruction, namely that Adam was formed first then Eve. Paul grounds his instruction about leadership in the church on a creational ordinance. God could have made Adam & Eve at the same time, but he chose not to. Why? To set up male/female relationship with this intention—that men would lead and women would support men’s lead. This is not due to any inherent inequality between men and women, both Adam and Eve bear the image and glory of God, rather it is a difference in roles. We practice this all the time. Not everyone on the baseball team can be the coach. The coach alone has authority over the team and team members follow and support his authority. But they aren’t inferior. By affirming and supporting the authority of men in your lives, ladies, you can walk out your Beauty of Spirit. Cultivate a quiet spirit, not because men demand it, but because God has created you for it. Walk out your imperishable beauty in Jesus not as a dutiful performance but as an act of worship. Men, don’t demand this. Pray.

Beauty of Action

Finally, and briefly, women are called to the Beauty of Action. You are to adorn yourself, not merely in appearance and in spirit, but also in action. Verse 10 calls women adorn “with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.” Beauty of Action is a beauty in motion—doing good deeds. What kind of deeds? Consider 5:10: “*and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.*” Beauty in Action in Austin might read like this: “*having a reputation for good fashion, putting off children, partying, caring for herself, her body, devoting herself to image and external beauty.*” Beautiful women are women who model beauty to their children and others through good deeds—hospitality to others, serving the poor, caring for the needy, blessing the saints.” True beauty, enduring attraction flows outward not inward. It is a missional beauty, an attractive godliness that puts others needs before your own. Beauty of Appearance, Beauty of Spirit, and Beauty of Action are the work of God in Christ through his Holy Spirit in you. Take hold of

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your beauty and eternal life that is to come and pull it right into the present, not as a performance but as an act of worship.