

Gospel-motivated Modesty

1 Peter 3:3-4

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One of our core values at Bethel is the unapologetic preaching of God's Word. If the Bible says it, we say it. This value is put to the test when what God says runs in the opposite direction of what seems to be normal and accepted. We have before us today one of those biblical truths that swims against the cultural tide. You will need to check your heart and ask, *if I am resistant to what God's Word says, what is my real priority for why I do what I do?*

Our series continues in 1 Peter 3. Context is critical. Peter is writing to Christians who are living in a moral and spiritual culture that was not friendly at all to the gospel of one Lord, one Savior, and one way to God through Jesus. Not only was it religiously opposed to Christianity, it was morally opposed. One clear example is how sexualized and sensual the Greco Roman-world was. Read the accounts of Corinth or Pompeii and the degree of sexual obsession would make even our culture blush. The human body and its sensualities were idealized and worshiped. You have probably seen Roman statues. Naked men and women. Their forms smooth and perfected. These were the icons of ideal humanity. The women especially were featured in alluring poses in various stages of undress.

In the midst of this sexual idolatry there were women who became Christians and their husbands did not. What should they do? How should they act? How should they present themselves to their husbands? To their fellow believers in church or in the marketplace? Christianity is freedom from obsession about our appearance, identity in looks, or for women, the sexualizing of their appearance to gain acceptance by others. It's freedom to let the beauty of Jesus formed in us to be what we look to for value and acceptance.

"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, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—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." (1 Peter 3:1-4 ESV)

Our focus is verses 3 and 4. You will notice that the repeated word in both is "adorning." Verse 3 says this adorning **is not** to be external. Verse 4 says the adorning **is** to be internal. We see that "adorning" is not clothes or jewelry or hair per se, otherwise you could read this to be a command against any clothes at all.

The adorning in view goes to what a woman is looking to as her source of beauty or attraction or worth. The reason internal beauty is the priority is explained at the end of verse 4—this is the beauty *"which in God's sight is very precious."* God doesn't assess a woman externally no matter how many beauty aids she wears. He assesses feminine beauty and worth internally.

There is something not to do and then something better we are to do. Not to do? Don't assess your worth by the popular beauty garnishes Roman women highly valued. Guess what first century women highly valued? *Hair. Jewelry. Clothes.*

The Roman world rivaled our own in terms of personal care products, designer fashion, jewelry, and the like. They had their own Armani, Ralph Lauren, and Calvin Klein. Ancient artwork shows very elaborate hair and jewelry and lots of cosmetics. Just like our culture, these beauty aids were highly valued and expensive. So the rich were the ones who could afford them and flaunt them. And they did.

First century Roman author Juvenal writes,

"There is nothing that a woman will not permit herself to do, nothing that she deems shameful, when she encircles her neck with green emeralds and fastens pearl to her elongated ears; there is nothing more intolerable than a wealthy woman." (Juvenal, as quoted by Thomas Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 153)

The lavish clothes and jewelry communicated a woman of means, a desirable woman, and a sensual woman. Her exterior said something. The other women knew it. The men noticed it. She liked the attention.

So what was the Christian woman to do when the culture was so focused on externals? Peter isn't saying that she should not do her hair, wear jewelry, or wear clothes for that matter. Peter undermines the obsession with externalities by saying your self-worth and value should not come from these things. They are not to be an ultra-priority. Do your hair but don't find your value in your hair. Wear jewelry if you like but don't think it adds anything to your real worth. Wear clothing but don't think that you are what you wear.

Why? God doesn't value these things. That is not to say God doesn't value beauty. He made women beautiful. The Bible notes the beautiful appearance of women like Sarah, Abigail, Rebekah, Tamar, and Esther. Song of Solomon celebrates female attractions. So the Bible is not prudish or ashamed of female external beauty. It notes it but doesn't idolize it. It notes its often tragic consequences. The focus of Scripture regarding female beauty and worth is on character and virtue and Christ-likeness.

Peter isn't denying a woman's right to beautify herself, it is calling the Christian woman to pour her "adorning" energies into cultivating the beauty of her inner self. Hear the distinction in these verses:

- *"Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion."* (Proverbs 11:22)
- *"Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised."* (Proverbs 31:30)

We need to see beauty and worth the way God does. Is it safe to say there are people who are physically more attractive than others by our culture's standards? The world highly values physical beauty. Worships it. Is that safe to say? Jesus said, *"What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."* (Luke 16:15) How about obsession with appearance? What about using my appearance to draw attention to myself? What about using clothing in ways that emphasize my physical features for the purpose of self-glory?

The context is a Christian wife but it applies to all women and men too. The Christian woman has discovered real beauty in Jesus' death on the cross for her. As a Christian, she has a new identity and worth based on that faith relationship with Jesus. But she lives in a culture obsessed with externals yet wants to win her unbelieving husband to saving faith. What should she do?

"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." (Verse 4)

Let me also read a parallel passage from the Apostle Paul, "*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, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.*" (1 Timothy 2:9–10)

Again, adorning means "source of beauty" or "source of worth." It refers to the focus of woman's attention for her sense of attractiveness. (Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, p. 139.) Real beauty and imperishable beauty is non-physical. It has little if anything to do with your weight, your height, your hair, your shape, your face, your body. Why? Because all of these things perish.

I was able to get a recent picture from inside the casket of Elizabeth Taylor. Let's put up the casket photo...Not really. We don't have to, do we? What has come of all her beauty? Diamonds? Clothes? Wealth? Perfumes? Designer fashions? Now they all mean absolutely nothing. They didn't really mean anything when she was living either.

That's the freeing point for Christian women. The beauty the Holy Spirit can produce in you is a lasting and eternal beauty. Which would you choose? Beyoncé beauty or eternal beauty? Jennifer Lopez beauty or eternal beauty? Time will take their beauty away. It would be foolish to find your meaning in it.

There is an imperishable beauty that God delights in that is available to any and every woman regardless of their body, social stature, or wealth. Peter calls it *gentleness* and a *quiet spirit*. When were those last featured on the front cover of a magazine? They are internal, but not invisible. In the world, they have little value. In God's eyes, they have great value. How about in the church?

Can our church be the one safe haven for women where we don't care or evaluate you by your physical attributes? If that is the case, then women in the church have no need to flaunt anything physical. Material. Fashionable. In the church, those shouldn't matter.

Further, Christian women (and men) should reflect a gospel understanding that their value isn't in those categories. What should we call that freedom from obsession with looks, dress, and appearance?

The Bible calls it **modesty**. Modesty isn't first about hemlines and fit of clothing. Modesty begins in the heart and a Christian woman finding her true identity in Jesus.

What is Gospel-motivated Modesty?

So what is modesty? How about we define it by defining its opposite:

Immodesty is the self-focused motivation that uses the external to draw attention to self. It draws or allows attention to one's physical beauty outside the confines of marital intimacy.

God gave each of us a body. The body is good. God made it. He will resurrect it someday. God also made us sexual. He made our sexual parts too. By God's design, those visual sensualities are to be reserved for the husband or the wife. Immodesty gives to others what is reserved for marriage. Immodesty uses the sensual power intended for the marital bedroom to draw attention and attraction in public. Why do you think advertisers use female bodies as they do? God made feminine sensuality powerful. Immodesty abuses that power for selfish purposes.

So hear this: modesty and immodesty begin in the heart. How should we feel about the woman who garnishes herself lavishly and sensually to gain approval? We should feel sad for her. That's an empty way to live and relationships based on physical appearance are shallow and dissatisfying. Remember, Marilyn Monroe killed herself.

Modesty begins in the heart. With what? The humility the gospel requires. The gospel tells me that all my efforts to be accepted by God based on external measures are like filthy rags. The gospel tells me I am justified fully and completely by God based entirely on Jesus fulfilling God's righteous demands for me on the cross. Because I am declared righteous I am fully accepted by Almighty God. My identity is in Jesus and through Jesus and because of Jesus. That's what it means to be a Christian. *"Modesty is humility expressed in a person's dress."* (C.J. Mahaney)

What is modesty about? Modesty is *all about him*. My heart motive should be that everything in my life and body glorifies Jesus. I want him to be noticed. I want his grace in my life to be the thing that people find attractive. Peter says, your hair won't evangelize your husband, but your attitude will. Your jewelry won't attract attention to God, but your gentle and trusting spirit will. Focus on internal loveliness and a watching world and a watching husband will think, *maybe there's something to this Christianity*.

Beauty Tips for Christian women (and Men Too)

Ask the right questions

Whenever you talk about appearance, legalists want lines and rules so they can feel self-righteous. On the other side of the spectrum are those who perhaps used to be legalists and now anything that sounds like talk about externals is repulsive. I can imagine all the "what about this?" questions that come from a message like this. Most of them are asking the wrong questions. Here are some right ones:

- **What is my heart motivation in this?**
- **Who is being promoted by this?**

Gospel modesty doesn't want to self-promote. It doesn't want to magnify me.

- **How will this affect others?**

You live in community with other people. Sisters, I really don't believe you understand the male mind. What you think is cute or trendy often reveals body parts that don't turn your brother's thoughts to God. Since this is such a struggle and since you love your brothers in Christ, especially at church, men shouldn't have to do the eye bounce. Could you love us enough to err on the safe side?

That's not to say frumpy is beautiful (it's not) or that godly women are as ugly as possible (they're not). God wired you for adorning and beauty. Be fashionable without being sensual. Keep those sensual powers under wraps and then unleash them on your husband.

"Modesty wants God to be noticed." (Tim Challies, *Modesty Matters: Imperishable Beauty*, Challies.com, November 13, 2013) That means when you are considering that new outfit, new hairdo, new tattoo, new whatever, you should ask, *Is this going to draw attention to me or will it be a distraction from my goal of drawing attention to Jesus? Can I wear this to the glory of God?* It's one thing to dress culturally appropriate, it's another to be culturally obsessed.

I think the goal is for dress and style to be a non-issue. To go unnoticed because it is neither ultra-stylish nor ultra not-stylish. One application for me is frankly what I wear when I preach. For years here I always wore a coat and tie. Styles changed. I have too. I don't really care that much because I don't want anyone to leave the church thinking about my fashion or what I wear. I don't want my style or lack of style to be a distraction. So I try to dress rather non-noticeable. I don't want our church to get the idea that I think fashion and appearance are ultra-important. They are not. They only become important when they distract from the gospel.

Teach our sons and daughters early

If God doesn't look at the outward but rather looks at the heart, what does that tell us about where our parenting emphasis should be? I feel this especially for our daughters who are growing up in a culture that objectifies them as sexual objects for men. Porn obviously does that, but normal and accepted teen culture does as well.

Sexting is a huge issue right now. Teenagers take pictures of their private places and send them to one another. It is the logical outcome of worth based on sensual appearance. This is why Miley Cyrus and Brittany Spears end up taking their clothes off for the camera. A sexualized identity inexorably leads them to do so.

So parents, how are you going to raise your kids to value what God values instead of what the culture values? Can I offer at least one guideline? *Celebrate what God celebrates. Don't celebrate what he doesn't.* As an example, we are coming off prom season at the local high schools. While thankfully there are many exceptions, it is dismaying to me to see Facebook pictures of young ladies in our church wearing outfits clearly designed to show off their body. Then parents post pictures celebrating their daughter's immodest dress. With that much cleavage on display, what can even a godly young man help but think about? Trust me, that teen boy doesn't need any help to think that way.

The real problem isn't the dresses or the pictures; these are symptoms. Once a girl finds her worth from boys in her appearance, she will seek that approval in increasingly sensual ways.

The battle starts long before prom in what we praise and celebrate and how we form their self-identity. Yes, health is important and our bodies need to be cared for as good stewards. But body is not identity. Help your children find worth and value in the internal and eternal. In beautiful attitudes like kindness and love. Celebrate them in your home and reward them. Post those pictures on Facebook. Talk them up. Model Christian modesty yourself and your son and daughter will catch on.

For our sons, we need to mold their understanding toward character-based love. Dads, be careful how you speak of women and the things your son sees your eyes enjoying. Praise your wife and daughters for spiritual qualities more than physical. Then pray a lot.

Jesus is more beautiful

"How passionately are some foolish men in love with the external beauty which they see in some women? The exact symmetry of parts, and comely proportion of the body? The amiable features and lovely mixtures of colors in the face; the beauty of the eyes in their spirit, their quick and graceful motions, and amorous glances? How does this ravish the hearts of some fond lovers, although the most beautiful body in the world is no better than painted clay, dirt, and corruption enclosed in a fair skin, which sickness will cause to look pale and wane, death will quite mar and spoil? But

the amiableness and beauty of Christ is more transcendent and permanent and, therefore, a more fit object for your love. Christ is fairer than the children of men. He is all fair, without any spot, altogether lovely, without any blemish or deformity.” (Thomas Vincent, *Love for the Unseen Christ*, p. 34.)

Gospel modesty...*“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.”* (1 Peter 3:4)

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