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**The Godly Woman (Part 1)**

**The Apostle's  
Apparel  
Appeal**

**# 1220-A**

**Series: I Timothy**



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(Note: The first paragraph is not on the video.)

Order in the church! Order in the church! You can almost hear Paul pounding the gavel, and you can all but hear a holy hush settle on the church at Ephesus as the apostle attempts to restore and maintain a state of settled behavior and consistent doctrine to that troubled fellowship. Order in the church was what it was all about. False teachers had entered in and all but destroyed the foundation stones upon which the Kingdom was built. And Paul, having commended young Timothy to the task of correcting their erring ways, had turned to the solution of the problem early, by beginning chapter two with a series of doctrinal statements tucked within an exhortation on prayer.

The church, you see, had lost its perspective. God had placed it there because God *wanted all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the Truth*,

[He] ...gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. (I Timothy 2:6 NIV)

Now Paul begins to address some of the real issues that are of primary importance to God. They have to do with the practical setting up of the church, and the controlling of the environment of the church and the working out of this new life this new nature that resides within us.

Paul begins to tell how this doctrine that needs to be taught ought to affect the church, the marketplace and the home. And lovingly in the process he is trying to correct some problems that had already developed in this young church, problems that had resulted in confusion and disorder. Today, we look at a most unusual subject that Paul, strangely enough, decided was of primary importance to discuss at this point in this letter where the welfare of that fellowship was concerned. It is the issue of how women dress.

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Now I know what you're thinking. Surely Paul had something more crucial to address than that. You must be saying to yourself, "How can women's wear be of significant value compared to 'praying for all men' and the 'ransom God paid for our salvation'?" Good question. Paul is about to tell us how but we will have to listen carefully. For the temptation is to either discard the passage as cultural in nature, and thus irrelevant in this age, or as surface instructions that have no deeper roots. Both courses would be a mistake. So we will embark upon a brief look at this passage along with its sister Scripture in I Peter, chapter three, to attempt an investigation at what is behind what would appear to be a relatively unimportant aside by the apostle. Incidentally, there *are no relatively unimportant asides in the Word of God*.

All Scripture is [God-breathed] given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, (II Timothy 3:16 NKJV)

Our look at this passage and the verses following will be in two parts. Today we will look at "The Godly Woman, Part 1". A title might be, "What the Well-Dressed Woman Is Wearing" or "The Apostle's Apparel Appeal". No matter what you call it, we will outline it like this:

- I- The Issue of Order
- II- The Testimony of Taste
- III- The Matter of Modesty
- IV- The Denial of Dignity
- V- The Evil of Extravagance
- VI- The Wardrobe and the Woman

The background of the passage has to do with prayer and, in particular, with prayer and the public assemblies, or church services. Paul has emphasized the importance of praying for all men and concludes his exhortation with this statement:

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; (I Timothy 2:8 NKJV)

So the command to pray for *all men* is followed by a command that *all men pray everywhere*. The emphasis is not on how to pray,

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for this was the common custom in Paul's day. The emphasis was on the *holy hands* or *the attitude of heart* with which men pray. It does no good to go through the motions of prayer if either bitterness or faithlessness permeates the prayers. We will return to this command, and we will return to the matter of the integrity of men in just a verse or two. Paul will be much harder on the men than on the women. But the issue of character will be primary in the rest of the book, and the attitude of the heart will underline all of the behavior yardsticks the apostle lays out for the church. So he begins by saying, "Whatever you do, pray". But he adds, "It won't do any good to go through the motions because, if you are angry with God or uncertain about God's Sovereignty, you are praying empty words."

Now comes one of those "likewise, you women" passages. And like the one in I Peter, chapter three, it is a parenthetical section that ties in all that has gone before, attaches it to the female population of the church, and then zeros in on a particular expression of the role of woman in the plan of God. Let's read it, and then take the first section.

In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing,

But, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

(I Timothy 2:9,10 NKJV)

### I- THE ISSUE OF ORDER

The phrase "in like manner also" indicates that women have a responsibility to pray, as well, but, as we shall see, it may take a slightly different form, so far as the public assemblies were concerned. This "in like manner", however, also appears to refer to the matter of hypocrisy, and the pretense that often went with prayer if the heart wasn't right. Women were assigned the task of being inwardly what they professed to be publicly, and demonstrating publicly what they professed to be inwardly. So Paul says, "In like manner, women must adorn themselves," in a certain way. The first word, then, that we need to define is that seemingly harmless little word *adorn*. It is more than it appears on the surface.

The Greek word translated *adorn* in this passage is the word

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*kosmeo* from which we get our English word *cosmetic*. It has the meaning of *to garnish, to polish, to decorate, to put in order*. It comes from the same root, as we shall see, as the word *kosmos* that God uses to describe the world order. That word is the opposite of *chaos*. It literally means, *to arrange in an orderly fashion*, so that when you see what you see, it is obvious that there is a plan attached. It is not something that *just happened*. Sometimes the word applies only to appearance, but normally it seems to refer to that which is seen as a reflection of the character beneath. So it is literally saying, "Likewise, I want you women to systematically put your appearance in order in the following manner. How you look will tell the world who you are."

Now it is obvious that cultures do change. Women no longer must walk about with ten pounds of clothing topped by a veil that makes them look like a camper covered by a tarp with tinted glass. It is no longer necessary for females to hide beneath a canopy of clothing. Though cultures change, there are some limits beyond which Christian women must not go. So it is not that they are to walk around like relics from another era, but the qualities demonstrated by *how they dress* must be consistent in every society. And in our society, which is so possessed with how women look, those qualities become even more important.

Contrary to what many may teach, this passage isn't promoting a no-makeup, no-hairdo, no-glamour approach but quite the opposite. It is explaining that the way a woman dresses must carry with it a quality of order that indicates careful, tasteful, moral objectives. And the fact that women today are accepted in sloppy, unkempt fashions is not the issue. The issue is that *nothing that belongs to God is disorderly*. And the way we appear in public says more to the world than we care to think about. So for starters, the word *adorn* indicates that women are to carefully plan and prepare for how they will look in public. They are not to become preoccupied with it, but neither should they appear to be something that just happened. This is perhaps a bit of an indictment on the sloppy look that's in today. Women no longer feel a compulsion to be dignified and together in their attire except when they come to church and when they are in the marketplace at work.

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While this passage is aiming primarily at how women appeared in the assemblies, its deeper meaning went beyond into the realm of how what you wear indicates who you are. As a child of the King, you are royalty. You are not to go around wrinkled, without your hair combed, without some thought about how what you wear might affect your testimony. The issue isn't that everyone is doing it. God's people aren't everyone; they are special ones. So the issue of order is the first command. It literally says if you're a mess on the outside, you're a mess on the inside. If we haven't lost you yet, we'll move on.

### II- THE TESTIMONY OF TASTE

The second word in our passage is a cousin to the first. It is translated *modesty* in most translations, but that doesn't really express what it says in our society. The word is *kosmos*, and it literally accentuates the first commandment, but it carries with it more of an *appropriate* context. Unlike the verb, which had to do with the act of orderly preparation, this word is an expression of that orderliness which carries with it a *suitable* result.

Berkeley translates it *becoming attire*. The Emphasized New Testament uses the phrase *seemly attire*. The New Testament in Modern English uses the words *suitable attire*. The Twentieth Century New Testament says *with appropriate dress*. The real meaning is that the believing woman dresses in good taste always. She doesn't show up for church in tennis shoes, if she has anything else to wear. But neither does she go to the ball game in a fur coat. She blends in, not to conform, but rather not to detract from the nature within that God wants to reveal through her. *Discreet* is a good word that several commentaries use to describe this aspect of what the well-dressed woman wears. She just uses good sense. She's not trying to call attention to herself, she's trying to glorify her God, and so anything she does that makes her stand out in the crowd because of her appearance detracts from the nature of God who wants to express His character through her. So the godly woman plans her wardrobe carefully, but discreetly. She is tasteful at all times, never exceeding the bounds of propriety, but always appearing in public in a neat, orderly fashion, as one who belongs to a God of order.

### III- THE MATTER OF MODESTY

So while the word translated *modesty* really means *suitable*, the next word really covers the issue of modesty in dress completely. It is the word *aidos*. It is used only here in the New Testament, and it is translated in the King James Bible as *shamefacedness*. All commentators seem to agree that this is an unfortunate translation. It implies that women are to go around with their faces to the ground, or their faces veiled, the expression of shame and disgrace. Nothing, of course, is farther from God's mind.

The NIV uses the word *decency*, and this is a much more appropriate word. Literally, it appears to mean *that which expresses humility and godliness through morality*. One commentator says it this way: "the modesty which shrinks from overstepping the limits of womanly reserve." Another calls it "innate moral repugnance to that which dishonors". So basically, Paul is saying that Christian women must never dress in a way that defies the boundaries of exemplary moral behavior. Clothing that is suggestive, revealing, or sensuous in nature is out, no matter what the styles of the day dictate. It isn't ungodly to be stylish, but the higher law is that anytime style conflicts with purity, style loses out. A Christian woman's clothing ought never to call attention to the flesh, and ought never to be such that what she wears or how she wears it tends to arouse the lower nature of those who see her. To overlook that commandment is an affront to God, a poor testimony, an affront to her husband (if she's married), and a possible indicator of a character flaw, for it says to the world that something immoral lurks within. It may not be true. But nonetheless, Christian women do not have the option to take that chance.

### IV- THE DENIAL OF DIGNITY

The fifth word *sophrosune* is translated *sobriety* in the King James Version. It is translated *sensibly* in the NIV. It comes from a verb that is translated *of a sound mind*. Its basic meaning is one of self-control, or of a decision-making process that is totally controlled by God's laws at the expense of her emotions or appetites. One scholar refers to the word as meaning *dignified restraint*. It literally means *not controlled by passions*



*or fashions where clothes are concerned.* It is the Christian woman who calmly analyzes her clothing needs and those of her family based on what they can afford, what is practical, and what is God-honoring. Like the godly woman of Proverbs 31, she sews what she can, and she watches for bargains when she can, but she isn't overcome by every catalog that comes in the mail or everything that suddenly appears in the window of the department store.

Her decisions about what to wear are not made out of insecurity. She isn't afraid to be a little behind the latest fashion if it's not in her budget. She doesn't buy on impulse, doesn't buy out of spite, and doesn't buy out of jealousy, because her best friend just got a new dress. What she buys is practical, sensible, wearable, and durable. She is simply sensible and self-controlled when it comes to clothes.

#### V- THE EVIL OF EXTRAVAGANCE

The final phrases in our passage deal with the excesses that occur when affluence intrudes on good taste. Paul words it with a great deal of detail, and he does so that we might not miss the point of the passage, but we must also be careful not to take it out of context, or to ignore the totality of the picture as we try to apply this one portion. He is dealing with the evil of extravagance and he says it like this,

...not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing,  
but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with  
good works. (I Timothy 2:9,10 NKJV)

Women were not to be noticed for their elaborate hairdos, their expensive jewelry, or their designer clothes. They are to be noticed for the good works that God produces through them. This is the trademark of a woman who professes to be godly and is. It does not mean women are not to wear jewelry, not to have their hair arranged or not to wear nice clothes. But it is a stern warning against two things:


1- Extravagance that calls attention to itself

2- Extravagance that calls attention to your ability to be extravagant—a badge of your wealth, displayed on your body as a symbol of success. Paul says, “Stop it.” Nobody cares how

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rich you are. And anything you do to flaunt it is a slap in the face of the God who allowed you to have what you have as a gift from Him.

### THE GOAL OF GOD

A woman with long brown hair is shown in profile, looking into a hand mirror held up to her face. The mirror reflects her face, which has a serene expression. She is wearing a pink top.

The Nature of God should be reflected through a woman's life.

Her clothing must not detract from God's reflection.

- It must not be sloppy, slothful, or in disarray.
- It must not be sensuous or immodest.
- It must not be inappropriate or distasteful.
- It must not be extravagant or unnecessarily expensive.

Here then, is God's goal for a woman. It is that the joy of God radiates from her face, the love of God is manifest through her actions, and the peace of God permeates her being even in times of deep waters. To do that, the clothing she wears must neither overshadow her godliness by calling attention to itself nor detract from her godliness by implying that any thing that belongs to God is slothful or sloppy or in disarray. She must not defy God's holiness by wearing that which is immodest. She must not defy the humility of Christ by wearing that which is gaudy or ostentatious. She must not defy the sensitivity of God by wearing that which is inappropriate or distasteful and she must not detract from the simplicity of the Gospel or the generosity of God by wearing that which is extravagant or unnecessarily expensive.

If self is under God's control, what a woman wears will glorify God. And while what is stylish and acceptable in the fashion world may vary, the basic premises upon which a woman's choices are made never vary. Within the scope of those guidelines, she appears to be free to wear that which is stylish and fashionable. But any violation of those yardsticks violates God's fashion laws and thus is not acceptable.

VI- THE WARDROBE AND THE WOMAN

What I believe Paul is saying in this passage is that “clothes don’t make the woman, but they do reflect who she really is”. And, of course, not in the way the world would dictate. The world would have her wear the latest fashions to prove she is current, the most risqué fashions to prove she is worldly, the most expensive fashions to prove she is successful, and the most ostentatious fashions to prove she is her own person.

Paul is saying, “Don’t try to out-world the world.” You can’t do it. What you can do, however, is to out-shine the world from within. Peter says basically the same thing in I Peter 3, a passage we will be looking at in detail in our next study. The parallel passage to this one says,

Your adorning should not be outward—braided hair;  
putting on gold trinkets, or putting on robes;

Instead it should be the inner personality of the heart with the imperishable qualities of a gentle and quiet spirit, something of surpassing value in God’s sight.

(I Peter 3:3,4 paraphrase)

There is something which innately defies human understanding. It is a godly woman.

Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in  
time to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is  
the law of kindness.

She watches over the ways of her household, And does not  
eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband  
also, and he praises her:

Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who  
fears the Lord, she shall be praised.

(Proverbs 31:25-28,30 NKJV)

A problem existed in the Ephesian church that Paul was addressing in this letter. That problem included an atmosphere of worldliness that had permeated the women in the fellowship. They had forgotten the beautiful portrait their God intended their lives to paint upon the canvas of history. It was not to be a

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passive role, but it was to be a specific role. And to demonstrate the amazing difference Christ would make in the church, the role the woman was to represent, she must address her entire life to that of reflecting the character of God, as it was to emanate from her very face. There was to be an uncommon quietness, a gracious gentleness, a holy modesty, and a genuine transparency that could be explained in no other way but that the Spirit of God controls her life.

Because her emphasis was on the person within, she spent hours a day focusing on the things of God. Her heart was bathed in prayer. Her mind was clothed in the Word. Her spirit was constantly meditating on life from God's perspective. She quietly responded to life's injustices, because the portrait she was painting was one of the church indwelt by God, responding to life, rather than reacting to it.

Today's world wants to squeeze womanhood into a mold of defiance, of independence, of affluence, of self-centeredness. The world wants woman to dress the part and act the part and live the part of one who is happiest when she is being "herself". God on the other hand, wants to set woman free to be what she was created to be: selfless, gentle, kind, humble, radiant, and filled with an uncommon kind of joy. And He wants who she is because of who He is to be reflected in what she wears. Paul is saying, "Ladies, the choice is yours."

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