

1 Timothy 2:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;

Analysis

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; Paul turns to instructions for women in worship, emphasizing internal character over external appearance. "In like manner" connects to verse 8—just as men should pray with holy hands, women should adorn themselves appropriately. "Adorn" (kosmein, κοσμεῖν) means to arrange, order, or beautify—the same root as kosmos (κόσμος, ordered world). The concern isn't appearance itself but proper ordering of priorities.

"Modest apparel" (katastolē kosmiō, καταστολῇ κοσμίῳ) combines external propriety with internal modesty. "Shamefacedness" (aidous, αἰδοῦς) means modesty, sense of shame, or proper discretion—awareness of what is fitting. "Sobriety" (sōphrosynēs, σωφροσύνης) indicates self-control, sound-mindedness, or discretion. Together these emphasize internal character producing external appropriateness.

Paul specifies what not to emphasize: "broided hair" (elaborate, expensive hairstyles requiring significant time and money), "gold, pearls, or costly array"—ostentatious jewelry and expensive clothing designed to display wealth and status. The issue isn't these things themselves being sinful but using them to attract attention, display status, or provoke envy. Christian worship should focus attention on God, not personal appearance.

Historical Context

Greco-Roman culture featured stark class distinctions displayed through clothing, jewelry, and hairstyles. Wealthy women advertised status through expensive adornment requiring slaves' labor to maintain. Prostitutes and immoral women also used provocative dress and excessive adornment. In church gatherings including both wealthy and poor believers, ostentatious display would create division and distraction.

Ephesus was a wealthy commercial center where luxury goods were readily available. The temple of Artemis employed numerous prostitutes as part of its cult. Women converts from pagan backgrounds may have continued cultural patterns of using appearance to attract attention, compete with other women, or display wealth. Paul redirects priorities: Christian women should focus on godly character, not worldly status symbols.

The instructions parallel similar teaching in 1 Peter 3:3-4, suggesting this was common apostolic instruction for churches. The principle transcends first-century culture: believers shouldn't use personal appearance to seek attention, display wealth, or provoke envy. While specific applications vary by culture, the underlying principle—prioritizing godly character over external adornment—remains constant.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do your clothing and appearance choices reflect priorities—God's glory or personal attention-seeking?
2. In what ways might contemporary fashion trends conflict with biblical principles of modesty and discretion?
3. How can churches teach biblical modesty without legalism or cultural traditionalism disguised as biblical faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

ώσαύτως καὶ τὰς γυναικας ἐν καταστολῇ κοσμίω
In like manner also G3588 that women in apparel modest
G5615 G2532 G1135 G1722 G2689 G2887

μετὰ αἰδοῦς καὶ σωφροσύνης κοσμεῖν ἔαυτάς μὴ
with shamefacedness also sobriety adorn themselves not
G3326 G127 G2532 G4997 G2885 G1438 G3361

ἐν πλέγμασιν ἢ χρυσῷ, ἢ μαργαρίταις ἢ ίματισμῷ
in braided hair or gold or pearls or array
G1722 G4117 G2228 G5557 G2228 G3135 G2228 G2441

πολυτελεῖ
costly
G4185

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 4:30 (Parallel theme): And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do? Though thou clothest thyself with crimson, though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; thy lovers will despise thee, they will seek thy life.

Psalms 149:4 (Parallel theme): For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.

Isaiah 3:16 (Parallel theme): Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet:

Jeremiah 2:32 (Parallel theme): Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number.

2 Kings 9:30 (Parallel theme): And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window.

Proverbs 7:10 (Parallel theme): And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart.

Genesis 24:53 (Parallel theme): And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things.

Isaiah 61:4 (Parallel theme): And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.

Esther 5:1 (Parallel theme): Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house.

Proverbs 31:22 (Parallel theme): She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.