

What We Teach

THE CHURCH

God's Plan for Women in the Church ([1 Timothy 2:9-15](#))

[1 Timothy 2:9-15 \(NASB\)](#)

- ⁹ “Likewise, *I want* women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments,
¹⁰ but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness.
¹¹ A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.
¹² But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.
¹³ For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve.
¹⁴ And *it was not* Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.
¹⁵ But *women* will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.”

The role of women in the church is a topic that is hotly debated today. Unfortunately, the debate has left the pages of Scripture to find its resolution. The traditional doctrines are being swept away by the flood tides of evangelical feminism. Churches, schools, and seminaries are rapidly abandoning truths they have held since their inceptions. Dozens of books are being written defending the new “**truth**” regarding the role of women. Ironically, some of the authors of those books formerly held to the traditional, biblical view. But under the pressure of feminism they have abandoned biblical accuracy in favor of the culture. The biblical passages on women’s roles are being culturally reinterpreted, ignored because of the alleged anti-female bias of the biblical authors, or dismissed as the additions of later redactors.

The ultimate source of those attacks is the archenemy of God, Satan. His goal, as always, is to overthrow God’s plan and corrupt His design. He is behind the effort to entice women away from their God-created roles in society, in the family, and in the church. Such a satanic enterprise is not new—in fact it was an issue in the church at Ephesus, because it was an issue in the Roman world of that time.

In a church plagued with false doctrine and false leaders, it is not surprising to find them struggling over gender roles. Some women were leading impure lives (cf. [1 Timothy 5:6](#), [1 Timothy 5:11-15](#); [2 Timothy 3:6](#)), and their indecency carried over into the worship service.

1 Timothy 5:6 (NASB)

⁶ “But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.”

1 Timothy 5:11-15 (NASB)

¹¹ “But refuse to *put* younger widows *on the list*, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married,

¹² *thus* incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge.

¹³ At the same time they also learn to *be* idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to *mention*.

¹⁴ Therefore, I want younger *widows* to get married, bear children, keep house, *and* give the enemy no occasion for reproach;

¹⁵ for some have already turned aside to follow Satan.”

2 Timothy 3:6 (NASB)

⁶ “For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses.”

Under the pretense of gathering to worship God, women were flaunting themselves and becoming serious distractions from worship. Their actions revealed that the intent of their heart was evil. Since worship is central to the life of the church, it was high on Paul’s list of issues for Timothy to confront.

Following his discussion of the role of the men when the church is called to evangelistic prayer (**1 Timothy 2:1-8**), Paul turns to the subject of women in worship. He addresses their **1) appearance, 2) attitude, 3) testimony, 4) role, 5) design, and 6) contribution.**

1) The Appearance of Women

1 Timothy 2:9a, c (NASB)

⁹ “**Likewise**” [**hōsautōs=in the same way**], *I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments.*”

“**Likewise**” refers to **verse 8**, and marks the transition to a new aspect within the same overall subject (cf. **1 Timothy 3:8, 11**). Having discussed the conduct of men in the gathering of the church, he now turns to that of women.

1 Timothy 2:8 (NASB)

⁸ “Therefore I **want** the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.”

1 Timothy 3:8 (NASB)

⁸ “Deacons **likewise** [**hōsautōs=in the same way**] *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain.”

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1 Timothy 3:11 (NASB)

¹¹ “Women **must likewise** [**hōsautōs=in the same way**] *be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.*”

1 Timothy 2:9a, c (NASB)

⁹ “**Likewise**” [**hōsautōs=in the same way**], *I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments.*”

The verb in this sentence must be supplied from [verse 8](#).

1 Timothy 2:8 (NASB)

⁸ “Therefore I **want** [**boulomai= “I will”, “I command” or “I purpose”**] the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.”

[**boulomai= “I will”, “I command” or “I purpose”**]

As noted in the discussion of that verse, **want** is from **boulomai**, and could be translated “**I will**,” “**I command**,” or “**I purpose**.” Paul is not expressing his opinion or giving advice. His words carry divine authority. Men are commanded to pray and **likewise** women are mandated to adorn themselves in a manner fitting worship of God.

1 Timothy 2:9a, c (NASB)

⁹ “**Likewise**” [**hōsautōs=in the same way**], *I want women to “adorn” [kosmeō= “to arrange,” “to put in order,” “to make ready,” or “to decorate.”] themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments.*”

Adorn is from **kosmeō**, from which the English word “**cosmetic**” derives. It means “**to arrange**,” “**to put in order**,” “**to make ready**,” or “**to decorate**.” A woman must arrange herself appropriately to join God’s people as they worship.

1 Timothy 2:9a, c (NASB)

⁹ “**Likewise**” [**hōsautōs=in the same way**], *I want women to “adorn” [kosmeō= “to arrange,” “to put in order,” “to make ready,” or “to decorate.”] themselves with proper [kosmios= “orderly, i.e. decorous :- of good behavior, modest.”] clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments.*”

Part of that important preparation involves the outside, the wearing of **proper clothing**. **Proper** translates **kosmiō**, which, like **kosmeō**, derives from the noun **kosmos**. **Kosmos** is often translated “**world**,” but it really means “**order**,” or “**system**.” It is the antonym of “**chaos**.”

1 Timothy 2:9a, c (NASB)

⁹ “**Likewise**” [hōsautōs=*in the same way*], *I want women to “adorn”* [kosmeō= “to arrange,” “to put in order,” “to make ready,” or “to decorate.” themselves with proper [kosmios= “orderly, i.e. decorous :- of good behavior, modest.”] “clothing” [katastolē= “apparel,” “to send or let down, to lower (kata, “down,” stolē, a loose outer garment)”], modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments.”

Katastolē (clothing) encompasses not only the clothing itself, but also the look—the whole demeanor. [katastolē= “apparel,” “to send or let down, to lower (kata, “down,” stolē, a loose outer garment)”]. A woman’s physical beauty by design was for her husband’s eyes only. Women are to come to the corporate worship ready to face the Lord. They must not come in slovenly disarray (careless, excessively casual) or personal display because of an unbecoming wardrobe or demeanor. There is a place for lovely clothes that reflect the humble grace of a woman, as evidenced in [Proverbs 31:22](#), “Her clothing is fine linen and purple.” Proper adornment on the outside reflects a properly adorned heart.

Proverbs 31:22 (NASB)

²² “She makes coverings for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple.”

1 Timothy 2:9a, c (NASB)

⁹ “**Likewise**” [hōsautōs=*in the same way*], *I want women to “adorn”* [kosmeō= “to arrange,” “to put in order,” “to make ready,” or “to decorate.” themselves with proper [kosmios= “orderly, i.e. decorous :- of good behavior, modest.”] “clothing” [katastolē= “apparel,” “to send or let down, to lower (kata, “down,” stolē, a loose outer garment)”], modestly and discreetly, not with “braided hair” [plegma= “broidered hair.”] and gold or pearls or costly garments.”

From the general principle in the first part of [verse 9](#), Paul moves to specifics in the latter part of the verse. In so doing, he hints at some of the practices that were causing confusion in the assembly. He starts with commenting about **braided hair**, a term that can generally mean “**hair styles.**”

His point is not that women should be indifferent to their hair. That would contradict what he had just said about careful preparation to put oneself in order. Paul’s intent is not to forbid certain kinds of hairdos, as if some reflected a more worshipful attitude than others. He is confronting any gaudy, ostentatious hairdo that would distract attention from the Lord and the purposes that are holy. Women in that culture often wove **gold, pearls**, or other jewelry through their hairdos to call attention to themselves and their wealth or beauty.

There is nothing wrong with owning jewelry. Solomon’s bride in Song of Solomon wore gold and silver jewelry ([Song of Solomon 1:10-11](#); [Song of Solomon 4:9](#)), as did Rebekah ([Genesis 24:53](#)).

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Song of Solomon 1:10-11 (NASB)

¹⁰“Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, Your neck with strings of beads.”

¹¹“We will make for you ornaments of gold With beads of silver.”

Song of Solomon 4:9 (NASB)

⁹“You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, *my* bride; You have made my heart beat faster with a single *glance* of your eyes, With a single strand of your necklace.”

Genesis 24:53 (NASB)

⁵³“The servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother.”

There is an appropriate time and place for that, as affirmed by the words of [Isaiah 61:10](#):
[Isaiah 61:10 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁰“I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”

But jewelry was (and is) often used as a way of flaunting a woman’s wealth or calling attention to herself in an unwholesome way. It is that preoccupation which Paul forbids in the place of worship.

When a woman dresses for the worship service to attract attention to herself, she has violated the purpose of worship (cf. [1 Peter 3:3-5](#)).

[1 Peter 3:3-5 \(NASB\)](#)

³“Your adornment must not be *merely* external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses;

⁴but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.”

⁵For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands.”

The fourth-century church father **John Chrysostom** wrote,

“And what then is modest apparel? Such as covers them completely and decently, and not with superfluous ornaments; for the one is decent and the other is not. What? Do you approach God to pray with brodered hair and ornaments of gold? Are you come to a ball? to a marriage-feast? to a carnival? There such costly things might have been seasonable: here not one of them is wanted. You are come to pray, to ask pardon for your sins, to plead for your offences, beseeching the Lord, and hoping to render him propitious to you. Away with such hypocrisy!” (Cited in Alfred Plummer, “[The Pastoral Epistles](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll [New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1903], 101)

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1 Timothy 2:9a, c (NASB)

⁹ “**Likewise**” [hōsautōs=*in the same way*], *I want women to “adorn”* [kosmeō= “to arrange,” “to put in order,” “to make ready,” or “to decorate.”] *themselves with proper* [kosmios= “orderly, i.e. decorous :- of good behavior, modest.”] “**clothing**” [katastolē= “apparel,” “to send or let down, to lower (kata, “down,” stolē, a loose outer garment)”], *modestly and discreetly, not with* “**braided hair**” [plegma= “broided hair.”] *and gold or pearls or costly garments* [polytelēs= “extremely expensive”].”

Another way women in Paul’s day flaunted their wealth and drew attention to themselves was by wearing **costly garments**. The expensive dresses worn by wealthy women could cost up to **7,000 denarii**.

Pliny the Elder, a first-century Roman historian, described a dress of Lollia Paulina, wife of the Emperor Caligula, which was worth several hundred thousand dollars by today’s standards (*Natural History 9.58*).

Dresses of the common women could cost as much as **500-800 denarii**. To put that into perspective, the average daily wage of a common laborer was **one denarius**. Because of the extreme expense, most women probably owned only two or three nice dresses in their lives. For a wealthy woman to enter the worship service wearing an expensive dress would shift the focus of attention to her. It could also stir up envy on the part of the poorer women (or their husbands).

Such showy displays were criticized even by non-Christian writers. In his sixth satire, the **first-century Roman poet Juvenal** wrote,

“There is nothing that a woman will not permit herself to do, nothing that she deems shameful, and when she encircles her neck with green emeralds and fastens huge pearls to her elongated ears, so important is the business of beautification; so numerous are the tiers and stories piled one another on her head! In the meantime, she pays no attention to her husband!”

In his work *The Sacrifices of Cain and Abel*, the **first-century Jewish philosopher Philo** described a prostitute.

“He portrayed her as wearing many gold chains and bracelets, with her hair done up in elaborate and gaudy braids. Her eyes were marked with pencil lines, her eyebrows smothered in paint. She wore expensive clothes embroidered lavishly with flowers.”

The wearing of expensive clothes and jewelry that drew attention away from the Lord was obviously inappropriate for women in the church. They were supposed to be demonstrating humble godliness, not appearing like prostitutes or showy pagan women. To come to church so attired was at best a distraction from honoring God, and at worst an attempt to seduce the men of the church.

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How does a woman discern the sometimes fine line between proper dress and dressing to be the center of attention? The answer starts in the intent of the heart. A woman should examine her motives and goals for the way she dresses. Is her intent to show the grace and beauty of womanhood? Is it to show her love and devotion to her husband and his goodness to her? Is it to reveal a humble heart devoted to worshiping God? Or is it to call attention to herself, and flaunt her wealth and beauty? Or worse, to attempt to allure men sexually? **A woman who focuses on worshiping God will consider carefully how she is dressed, because her heart will dictate her wardrobe and appearance.**