**GOSPEL CULTURE IN GOD’S HOUSEHOLD**

**CLOTHING AND QUARRELS**

**1 Timothy 2:8-10**

**INTRODUCTION**

Earlier this week, I struck up a conversation with two ladies while I was waiting to pick up my kids at school. One of the ladies, who has two girls, happily announced that she was expecting twin boys. The other lady, who has three girls herself, congratulated her and gave her a hug. But after the congratulatory remarks were done, the expectant mother looked at us and said, “I have no idea how to raise boys.” The other mother replied, “Neither do I.” That’s when they, knowing that I have four boys, both turned their gaze upon me, hoping that I would provide some wisdom.

There are many things I could have said. “Your life is over!” “Say farewell to peace and quiet!” But in the end, I settled on this: “They say boys are hard to raise early but easy later; girls are easy to raise early but hard later.” And as soon as I said that, they both looked at me with knowing smiles and said, “You’re so right.”

But was I? We live in a time of so much gender confusion that the differences between boys and girls, and men and women, are increasingly becoming lost. In fact, there are many people who would take offence at me (or anyone else) making general comments about what boys are like, or what girls are like, because they would see such comments as artificial, societal constructs that unfairly restrict or incorrectly define a child’s true identity.

I can certainly relate to that. I grew up as one who didn’t fit within most generalizations about boys. And yet, I still affirm that there are certain characteristics that are generally true about boys, and certain characteristics that are generally true about girls. As with all things, there are exceptions, but that doesn’t make the general conclusions any less true.

In our text today, the Apostle Paul makes some general observations about what men and women *tend* to do, and what men and women *should* do instead. The temptation for us is to respond to a text like this like the rest of our culture and say, “These generalizations aren’t fair.”

If that’s you, then I encourage you to remember that Paul isn’t just writing as a historical figure situated in a specific historic context, or as a male leader in a patriarchal society with skewed views of gender. He’s writing as a man who has been inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the very Word of God. His insights about men and women represent God’s very own thoughts about this topic, and if anyone knows what it means to be a man, and what it means to be a woman, it’s God, who made us male and female in his image.

If we approach our text today with this attitude, we’ll be able to learn much about what it looks like for men and women to be part of a church. Remember that the church is God’s household (1 Tim. 3:15). God is our father, and we are his children, and therefore, he has every right to tell us how we ought to behave in his household. We are to listen attentively as our Father lovingly leads us, and we are to submit to him willingly and joyfully as he addresses not only what we are to believe, but what we are to do.

God tells us how we are to handle conflict. God tells us how we should spend our time. God even tells us how we should dress, which is what we’re going to see in our text today.

That’s going to seem strange to us, because we live in a radically individualistic culture that mocks submission and exalts self-expression, and fashion is one of the important means of self-expression for many. But if you’re a Christian, you know that you no longer belong to yourself. You belong to God. You’ve been bought by the blood of Christ, so that you no longer live to bring yourself glory by what you wear. You live for Christ, and for the glory of *his* name, whether it be through what we say, do, or wear.

The title of this sermon is **Clothing and Quarrels**. My aim today is to show you that **God Wants Us to Please Him in How We Pray and in What We Wear.**

We will have two points today:

1. The Prayer Lives of Godly Men
2. The Good Works of Godly Women

(1) **THE PRAYER LIVES OF GODLY MEN**

There are two sets of instructions in our text today. One is for men, and the other is for women. Simply put, the instruction for men in verse 8 is “Don’t fight; pray.” The instruction for women in verses 9-10 is “Don’t be vain; do good works.” On the surface, they seem to be very different instructions, but at the heart they’re really the same, because they both address the sinful tendency to want to outdo other people. For men, they want to outdo one another by the force of their arguments. For women, they want to outdo one another by the beauty of their appearance.

In other words, the essence of the struggle for both men and women is pride. It’s thinking that you’re better than others and wanting to be recognized as such. It’s the desire to receive glory from other people as they recognize your superiority. This may find different expressions in men and women, but the sinful root is the same.

That’s why women can struggle with anger too. We see that in Numbers 12 (Miriam) and Philippians 4 (Euodia and Syntyche). And so, whether you’re a man or a woman, if anger is something you struggle with, you need to listen up, because God is addressing you.

But at the same time, we can’t miss the obvious point here, which is that God is specifically addressing men in verse 8. God himself, as the head of our household, wants to take a moment and speak to his sons, and therefore all the men here, whether we believe we struggle with anger and quarreling or not, need to listen as our Heavenly Father addresses us.

So what does our Heavenly Father have for us today? First, he says, “I desire then that in every place the men should pray”. Some fathers want their sons to be known for their athletic prowess. Other fathers want their sons to be known for their academic achievements. God wants his sons to be known for their devotion to prayer.

And since the essence of prayer is simply communing with God – talking to him, thanking him, calling on him for help – what God is saying is he wants men to have a personal relationship with him. He wants to be close to his boys. He’s not interested in merely being the strong, silent provider of the family. He wants to hear from us, and he wants to speak with us.

But when, and where? *Everywhere*. That’s what verse 8 says. “I desire then that in *every place* the men should pray”. You don’t just commune with your Heavenly Father when you’re in the quiet of solitude, or at a church prayer meeting. Whether you’re at home or at church, in the car or at the grocery store, by yourself or surrounded by people, it’s in *every place* that God wants us to commune with him through prayer.

The defining characteristic of the godly man is prayer. It’s not how well you can debate theology. It’s not how many weights you can lift. The skill, discipline, and practice that God most wants us to cultivate most is prayer. That’s the distinguishing mark of a man who pleases God.

I want to emphasize that this doesn’t mean that God doesn’t want women to pray. Of course he does. The entire context of Chapter 2 relates to what both men and women are to do when the church gathers in corporate worship, and what Paul emphasized first of all in verses 1-7 was prayer, not just by men, but by all. Prayer by all and for all is the first priority of the local church, for both men and women, because God wants to be just as close to his daughters as he is to his sons.

But here in verse 8, our Heavenly Father zeroes in on his sons, because he wants us to lead in this area, and yet he knows how easily we fail. We pride ourselves in being self-sufficient and strong, so we don’t cry out to him in prayer. Or we busy ourselves with our little hobbies and projects and don’t make time for personal communion with God. We see ourselves as our own saviours, the ones who will fix all of our own problems, rather than turning to the one who will heal our wounds and empower us for service. Men, we must pray in every place at every time, because as verse 3 said about prayer, “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour”.

Second, we are to pray, “lifting holy hands”. When it comes to prayer, posture matters. When I’m praying with my kids at bedtime, there’s a reason why I tell them to sit up and sit still. Or when we’re about to begin our pastoral prayers, many of us bow our heads. Why? Because we want the posture of our bodies to reflect and to lead the posture of our hearts.

What you do with your body affects what you feel in your heart. We don’t just see it in the Bible. We see it in human institutions and traditions as well. I’ll never forget the moments when an entire room of people would stand in silent attention when a judge would enter the courtroom. By doing that, I felt a different level of respect for the judge than if we had all remained seated.

The Bible speaks of the same sorts of things in the Old Testament. At times, it talks about “bowing down” before God in reverence. It talks about kneeling in submission, or falling flat on the ground in fear. It also talks about standing at attention with respect, like when Solomon dedicated the Temple.

The posture that Paul chooses to emphasize here is the lifting of hands, a practice that was intimately tied to prayer in the Old Testament:

“Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary.” (Psalm 28:2)

“Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!” (Psalm 134:2)

“Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!” (Psalm 141:2)

“And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen,’ lifting up their hands.” (Nehemiah 8:6)

“Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven” (Lamentations 3:41)

The Bible never explains why we should do this or what it symbolizes, but from my own experience it can symbolize a number of things: Offering myself to the Lord; Surrendering myself to his will; Opening up my heart to his grace; Lifting up my soul to the glory of his presence; Reaching out to him for help. It’s a beautiful posture that serves my soul well in worship and in prayer.

But just in case people get the impression that posture is all that matters, Paul adds that God’s not just looking for the lifting of hands. He’s looking for the lifting of “holy hands”. In the Old Testament, clean hands were a symbol of pure hearts. It’s the reason why priests had to wash their hands in a purification ceremony before entering the Tabernacle. It’s the reason why the elders of a city were to wash their hands over a sacrificed animal when someone was murdered near their city but the murderer was never found. It was their God-given way of saying, “Our hands did not shed this blood. We are innocent before our Holy God.” (Deut. 21)

Paul’s saying that we can’t just approach God with the right posture. We must approach God with the right purity of heart. God cares more about what we look like on the inside than on the outside. That’s why Psalm 24:3-4 says,

“Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.”

There are many things that dirty a man’s hands, but the thing Paul chooses to emphasize in verse 8 is “anger and quarreling”. If you approach God while harbouring anger towards your brothers, you can’t expect God to answer your prayers. Or if you’re in the middle of a bitter quarrel with your wife, God may not heed your petitions. The purity of our hearts affects the power of our prayers. This isn’t the only place that the Bible speaks about this:

“If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.” (Proverbs 28:9)

“If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” (Psalm 66:18)

“Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way… so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7)

Brothers, we must pray with holy hands lifted up without anger or quarreling, because if our hands are dirty from bitter disagreements, or stained with unrepentant sin, God will not answer our prayers.

This is why we need Christ. This is why we pray in Jesus’ Name, not our own, because no man can approach God with a pure heart and clean hands. Even our finest works are stained with sin. But Christ has died for our sins and cleansed us from all unrighteousness, so that we can approach the throne of God with boldness, clothed with the very righteousness of Christ.

The only reason why we can have holy hands is because his holy hands were pierced. The only reason why we can lift up our hands in prayer is because Christ was lifted up on the cross. Christ, and Christ alone, makes it possible for us to pray without fear of condemnation or rejection. And so, let us repent of our sins of anger and quarreling, trust in Christ, and lift up holy hands in prayer.

That’s what God has to say to the men in our church. He says, “Boys, I want you to become men of prayer.” Is that what you want to be known for? What is it about your reputation that matters most to you? Is it that you were good at your job? Is it that you were a faithful provider? Or is it that you were a man of prayer?

Fathers, what are you teaching your sons to value? Is it hard work? Is it personal integrity? Is it moral purity? Those are all good things, but none of them are better than prayer.

If someone were to look at your schedule, or the way you spend your time with your sons, or the kinds of extra-curriculars that you’ve chosen to put them in, what would they conclude about the values you’re trying to pass on to them? Would prayer factor in at all?

Men, we’re all on a journey of learning what it means to love what God loves, and all of us need to know just how much God loves prayer. He wants men to pray, and he wants men to teach the next generation of men to pray as well, because that’s what is good and pleasing in the sight of God.

(2) **THE GOOD WORKS OF GODLY WOMEN**

This is God’s word to his sons. “Boys, I want you to be known for your devotion to prayer.” Now, as we transition to verses 9-10, our Heavenly Father turns his attention to his precious daughters and says, “Girls, I want you to be known for your good works.” This leads to our second point: The Good Works of Godly Women.

At the outset, I want to point out that these instructions don’t just apply to women, because men can struggle with vanity as well. They can flaunt their bodies, or spend excessive amounts of money on designer clothing, or care more about toning their bodies than tuning their hearts to Christ. Vanity is a gender-neutral vice.

That’s especially true in a visual generation like ours. Our eyes are being constantly bombarded by images of people whom the world sees as beautiful. We see them in films and TV shows. We see them in commercials. We see them in the broadcast booths of sports arenas. We see them in targeted ads on our phones. Everywhere we look, there are beautiful people who make the rest of us look and feel plain.

But when we see how much attention and admiration these people receive, ordinary people like us can’t help but think, “They must be more valuable than me. If I want to be valuable like them, I need to look like them.” And so, people rush to the latest fashion trend, or hair style, or revolutionary diet, all so that we can feel a little bit better about ourselves.

That’s actually what’s going on in verse 9 when Paul specifies that women are not to adorn themselves with “braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire”. Historical studies show us that the “pop culture icons” of the 1st century Roman Empire were dressing precisely in this manner: their hair was elaborately braided and piled together like towers and decorated with gems and gold and pearls. And one of the characteristics about these icons was that they were committed to sexual liberation and excess. So when Paul says don’t adorn yourselves with “braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire”, he’s not against each of these things *per se*. He’s against what they symbolized when they were all worn together. If we apply this to our context, we might hear Paul saying, “Don’t dress like promiscuous pop stars.”

Every generation thinks it’s unique, but we’re really all the same. “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). This desire we feel to look like the rich and beautiful has been a struggle throughout the ages for everyone, male or female, young or old, but it has been especially difficult for women. That’s why God addresses women specifically on this issue in verses 9-10. Women are particularly vulnerable to believing the lie that their value is tied to their appearance, and that their looks dictate their worth. But God is saying, “You’re not valuable because of what you do to make yourself beautiful. You’re valuable because of what I’ve done to save you.”

That’s what verses 5-6 were about:

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all”.

The King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, the eternal Son of God, gave *himself* to ransom you and to bring you back to himself. In Christ, you’re not just worth a king’s ransom. You’re worth the giving of the King *himself*. That’s why you are beautiful and precious. You are precious to *God*. And if you are precious to *God*, you don’t need to be seen as precious by anyone else.

It’s these truths that free us to obey the instructions in verses 9-10. The gospel is the key to modesty. These verses aren’t just about clothing. They’re about where you find your value. If it’s in your looks, or your physique, or in how much people notice you, you’re not going to be able to live by these verses, dressing in “respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control”. You’re going to keep doing what you’ve always done. You’re going to dress to impress, because when you don’t impress, you don’t feel like you’re worth much at all.

The gospel frees you from that lie, so that when you’re at the shopping mall, you’re not thinking about what reveals. You’re thinking about what’s respectable. You’re not thinking about what’s going to draw the attention of men. You’re thinking about what’s going to please your Heavenly Father. When you’re thinking about what to wear, you’re not trying to excel in self-glorification. You’re trying to excel in self-control.

What a remarkable concept to apply to what you wear. *Self-control*. “I could wear this. Everyone else is wearing it. I’d look pretty good in it. *But I’m not going to*. Instead, I’m going to choose something *modest*.” That’s radical, and it makes no sense in the eyes of the world. But God sees decisions like that and smiles, because he sees that you’re finally beginning to understand that how much you’re worth has nothing to do with how good you look.

Paul ends this instruction in verse 10 with a word on what it truly means to adorn yourself as one who professes the name of Christ. He says that Christian women are to adorn themselves “with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.” Paul’s showing us that this isn’t just about clothing. If it were, there would be no need for verse 10, because he’s already said what appropriate clothing looks like in verse 9. But here in verse 10, he talks about a different kind of adorning, the adorning of good works, which is proper for women who profess godliness.

This kind of beauty is far greater than any beauty you could get from nature, or jewellery, or clothing. All of that beauty will fade with time, but this beauty is *imperishable*. It will last *forever*.

But what are these good works? Paul talks about them in Chapter 5:10. It’s not an exhaustive list, but it’s nonetheless helpful to give us a sense of what he’s talking about. The context is he’s speaking about widows who were to be enrolled in the church benevolence fund, and he describes the qualifications of such women as follows:

“…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.”

Ladies, do you want to be beautiful in a way that really matters? Then look no further. Don’t ask Google. Don’t browse the magazine rack. Don’t study the latest celebrity trends. Instead, study the Bible’s teaching on good works. Speaking of this list of good works in 5:10, Philip Ryken writes,

“These are God’s beauty tips for women.”

I thank God that he has gifted our church with many lovely ladies. Ladies who are committed to their children. Ladies who show hospitality by welcoming strangers into their homes and lives. Ladies who aren’t afraid to do the dirty work of serving the saints and caring for the afflicted. You may feel that the world has overlooked your good works, and perhaps it has, but God hasn’t. God sees it all. The one who pronounced all creation to be good looks upon your unending efforts to care for your children at home, or to invite people into your home, or to care for those who are suffering and says, “That’s good”. You may feel that you could never be beautiful in the eyes of the world, and perhaps you can’t, but God looks upon all that you’re trying to do for the glory of his name and says, “That’s my beautiful, precious daughter.”

True beauty is found not in what one wears, but in what one does for the Lord. True beauty is found in good works, not in good looks. That’s the kind of beauty that pleases God. That’s the kind of beauty that will last.

**CONCLUSION**

Do you have this kind of beauty? Do you value good works over good looks? Those are difficult questions to answer. To help you diagnose your true beauty, Philip Ryken encourages women to ask themselves these questions:

“How much money do I spend on my appearance—on clothes, jewelry, cosmetics, beauty treatments, and the like? How does that compare with my giving to the Lord’s work? How much time do I spend in front of the mirror, and how much time do I spend on my knees? When a Christian woman does look in the mirror, she should look for good works, which are the proof of genuine faith in Jesus Christ.”

Some of you may look into the mirror of good works and not see very much. If you’re honest with yourself, you’re more concerned with other people serving you than you serving others. God’s word to you isn’t just “do more”. It’s “come to me, and let me change your heart”. Only the gospel can free you from living for yourself. Only the gospel can free you from vanity. Come to Christ, know his love, and with time, your love for others will grow as well.

Some of you may have a different problem. You see a lot of good works in the mirror, but they don’t seem to matter because you’re heavier than you want to be, or you’re a few sizes larger than you used to be, and you just can’t get over it. You can’t get over this part or that part of your body, because those parts make you feel ugly. My dear sister, you may feel that what you need is a radical diet or a new workout routine, when in fact what you need is fresh faith in God’s Word. Fresh faith to believe that good works outshine good looks. That what you did in life was more important than how you looked.

The wonderful thing about this is that we don’t have to do this alone. We can help each other change the way we see what true beauty really is. Husbands, do you only tell your wife she’s beautiful when she’s glammed up for a night out? Or do you tell her she’s beautiful as she pours out her life and energy for your kids, or as she serves the church, or as she cares for the afflicted?

How about your daughters? Do you only compliment them when they’re wearing a cute dress, or do you compliment them when they go out of their way to serve those around them?

Young men, who do you spend your time giving your attention to? Is it the outgoing, attractive young woman who always seems to have a group of people around her? Or is it the older woman whose youthful beauty has faded away, but who works tirelessly to do good to the people around her? That’s the one who is truly beautiful, but do you see her as beautiful? Philip Ryken writes,

“A woman who is beautiful in the sight of God ought to be beautiful in the eyes of godly men.”

Brothers, let’s help our precious sisters who are devoted to good works to see themselves as beautiful in the sight of God by showing them how much we value them. We can do that by expressing our appreciation for them. We can do that by going out of our way to honour them. We can do that by holding them up as examples to follow.

Let us not love as the world loves. The world loves what is fleeting and vain. God’s people love what lasts, and what lasts is good works done for the glory of our great God and Saviour.