

More Than Skin Deep

For Better or For Worse, Part 3

1 Peter 3:3-4

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Peter's immediate audience was obsessed with appearance like we are today. They greatly desired to look rich or beautiful or sophisticated. To give these impressions, people would highlight what they valued the most. Peter calls for the church, and Christian wives in particular, to show themselves as distinct from the world by valuing internal and eternal things more than the physical and temporary.

Discussion Points:

Peter wants Christians to have a different perspective than non-Christians when it comes to what we deem as valuable in this life.

- What are some examples of what the world values?
- Do Christians tend to value these same things?
- Should Christians value those things in the same way?
- What do Christians value that the rest of the world does not?

Most of the time we can recite biblical answers for what should be most important to us, yet we often fail to live up to what we have been called to do and how we should act.

- Do your values correspond to your Christian faith?
- Does your behavior match up with your internal values?
- Can others assess your values?
- Would an outsider's assessment of your priorities and values be the same as your own self-assessment?
- Do you think it is easy for others to tell that you are a Christian and distinct from the world?

Discussion Guide cont.

1 Peter 3 shows Peter instructing Christian wives who have unbelieving husbands how they should live in their homes to be a godly witness to their whole house. It is in this context that Peter brings up how these women should carry themselves and dress.

- Why would Peter bring up matters of appearance in this context of how a Christian wife can demonstrate her faith to her husband?
- Is Peter saying it is inherently wrong to look nice or to wear jewelry?
- If Peter is not saying outlawing hair-dressing or wearing any jewelry, what is he saying?

In 1 Peter 3:4, Peter outlines the inner adornments that should be present in the life of a Christian. These characteristics of the heart are of utmost importance.

- How can you adorn the “hidden person of the heart”?
- What does it mean to have a gentle and quiet spirit?
- Why is this type of adornment more valuable to God than physical appearance or possessions?

Peter contrasts his own description of how the world tries to dress up and decorate themselves in verse 3 with how Christians should act in verse 4. He demonstrates that real value comes is found within. The thing that really matters is the heart. Inside the new heart of a Christian is true, “imperishable beauty ... which in God’s sight is very precious.”

- Should God’s values influence our own values?
- How can you shift your focus from the physical and temporary things of the world to the eternal and imperishable qualities of your spirit and character?

Gospel Connection:

God does not value the same things we tend to value by our sinful nature. We look to the outside appearance, but God looks at the heart. Peter knew this and wanted to encourage his listeners to cultivate their hearts to become more like Christ. When we become Christians, we are given a new heart and the Holy Spirit indwells us to shape us closer into the image of Christ. Jesus is the eternal God with all majesty and glory, but when he chose to be born as a man on earth, he did not come as the most beautiful or handsome person. He did not need to be. Instead, it was his perfect heart and character that shone through to show his beauty and love. Because of how he lived and what he valued, we are called to be imitators of his spirit and character instead of his face and body.

Discussion Guide cont.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** How do you spend your time and money? Do your actions reflect Christian values? Are you in line with how Peter is calling for Christians to live? Think about how you can re-order your priorities to be a faithful witness for Christ.
- Pray:** Thank God for giving you value. Ask him to help you shape your heart to be more directed toward him. Pray that He would help remind you of what really matters.
- Do:** Be distinct from the rest of the world. Live out your values. Be intentional in how you treat others to make sure you honor the beauty of a quiet and gentle spirit that belongs to Jesus Christ.

More Than Skin Deep

For Better or For Worse, Part 3

I Peter 3:3-4

If you were to travel back to the 1st century, it might surprise you to find the Roman Empire to be absolutely enamored with clothing, jewelry, hair styles, physical strength and appeal, along with the latest in fashion.

One 1st century historian wrote that in the Empire there were as many hairstyles as there were honeybees. Hair was waved, curled, dyed – sometimes jet black, sometimes auburn. Wigs were imported from Germany and as far away as India and the most popular wigs were blonde. Added to the hair were hairbands, pins and combs made of ivory or tortoiseshell; and for the wealthy, combs were crafted in gold and studded with gems.

When the Apostles were living and writing their letters to the New Testament churches silks, pearls, perfumes and jewelry imported from India alone valued, in today's economy, \$2 billion dollars annually.

I discovered in my studies that purple was the favorite color in the early centuries because it was the most expensive cloth. One purple garment would cost as much as the average person's annual salary.

If you could afford them, diamonds, emeralds and opals were favorite gems. One Roman woman had a ring valued at \$2 million dollars.

I read that pearls were actually coveted the most. Nero, the emperor, had a room in his palace where pearls were used as wallpaper (to just sort of demonstrate that he had more pearls than anybody else). The historian Pliny wrote that the wife of the emperor Caligula once appeared in a gown covered with pearls and emeralds, at a cost today of \$20 million dollars.ⁱ

America didn't invent glamor and glitz; in fact, early Christianity was growing inside a

luxuriant and decadent world of glamor and glitz – and Christians were living in a world obsessed with the physical appearance.

Women in the 1st century had an array of highly developed cosmetics; imported from around the world – they had rouge for their cheeks, lipstick in a variety of colors as well as eyeliners in colors that included brown, black and green. They also had fingernail polish in colors that included yellow and orange.

There are dads in here who don't want their daughters hearing this – sorry about that.

One author wrote that as a result of this obsession throughout the Roman Empire, women were under enormous pressure to look beautiful and fashionable.ⁱⁱ

I couldn't help but think that the 1st century and the 21st century have a lot in common, don't they?

I did a little research and found that Americans now spend the annual sum of \$40 billion dollars on cosmetics alone. That's a lot of lipstick . . . in a lot of colors.

Men are involved in this too – in fact, together, Americans shelled out \$1.4 billion in one year just for over-the-counter teeth whiteners . . . \$1.4 billion.

In terms of cosmetic sales worldwide, the country of Japan comes in second to America, with an annual expenditure of \$26 billion for cosmetics.

And none of this, by the way, includes money spent on cosmetic surgeries – which brings in another \$10 billion a year plus. Last year, more than 17 million Americans got some kind of tummy tuck, nose job, Botox injections or a face lift.

The trouble is, none of it brings a sense of contentment. In fact, in global surveys, even

though the United States is number one in cosmetics spending, survey responses place our country at number 23 in the “satisfied with life category”. Japan is second in spending on cosmetics but ranks 90th in “satisfied with life” responses.ⁱⁱⁱ

But the obsession is only moving faster and deeper . . . even more dangerous and invasive.

One author wrote an article for the Smithsonian Magazine a few years ago where he catalogued forms of cosmetic surgeries that are growing more and more mainstreamed.

For instance, in New York, women are having their toes surgically shortened and then strengthened with metal pins so they can fit into three-inch Jimmy Choo stiletto heels. I don’t know who Jimmy Choo is, but he’s not worth that surgery.

In China, where beauty pageants were once outlawed and considered “spiritual pollution”, they are now being held around the country. Since taller women are considered more beautiful, a procedure is becoming popular where shinbones are severed and metal inserts are implanted so that 3 inches of new bone can be grown – it’s an operation filled with the risks of deformation and weakened muscles – but you gain 3 inches of height.

Women throughout Asia are having surgeries on their narrow eyelids to make them rounder and more almond shaped. Skin-lightening products in Africa are surging in profits.

This author concludes – in a secular magazine by the way – by writing, “[There is a] global quest for bodily perfection . . . and it has generated an almost pathological obsession with our bodies.”^{iv}

I couldn’t help but think of the Apostle Paul when he wrote that the unbelieving world is marked by worshipping what he calls their belly – he writes, “Their god is their belly” – in other words, whatever it is they physically desire – whatever they want for their body, they pursue (*Philippians 3:19*).

Now the Bible never endorses a disregard for a healthy body. It never encourages misusing or

mistreating the body. It doesn’t tell us that the body doesn’t matter so you can ignore what it truly needs. But the Apostle Paul strikes a needed balance by writing to Timothy, “*bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. (1 Timothy 4:8)*.”

In other words, Paul makes it clear that physical exercise has some value; it’s just not as important as spiritual exercise. And Paul warns us to not lose sight of the fact that our bodies aren’t the priority – the obvious reason, he implies is that they aren’t permanent – in fact, God has a new, glorified body planned for you, Paul writes, in the life to come, which will literally last forever.

In the meantime, Christians face the same struggle with balancing physical appearance and spiritual development.

We all have the desire to look as good as we can – and from where I’m standing, all of you are doing a great job.

But the potential for obsession and imbalance didn’t automatically go away when you became a Christian.

In fact, I won’t ask for a show of hands, but if I asked you to raise your hand if you had at least one thing about your physical appearance that you would change if you could – the truth is, everyone would raise their hands. Some of us would raise both hands.

Some people would change their complexion; some people would change the size of their nose. We’d like to be taller or shorter, thinner or larger. Some would like blonde hair, some would have auburn hair and some of us would just like to have hair.

The truth is, unbelievers aren’t the only ones who struggle with the way they look.

The Apostle Peter is about to challenge us all with the fact that demonstrating the uniqueness of the gospel includes living lives that are not preoccupied with physical appearance.

Turn back to 1 Peter and chapter 3, where we left off in our last study. If you have been with us so far, Peter is writing to wives first.

He's writing to converted women, many of them newly converted no doubt – in the early church – and they are married to unbelieving husbands. These are women who have come out of a culture I have just described: a culture that worshipped youth, that worshipped physical strength, and that worshipped the body. Just go to a museum and look at the statues excavated from earlier centuries. It was all about the perfect body and these women in the church were saved out of that kind of decadent world of fashion and obsession with physical perfection.

Let's hear what the Spirit of God has to say through Peter as we pick it up at *verse 3. Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; 4. but 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.*

Peter is essentially delivering some life-changing truth that can free women (single or married, young or old) and men too, by this application: from focusing their lives by being bound up with their bodies—their appearance.

Peter begins by saying – in a sense – “let me challenge you regarding your *adornment.*”

The word he uses for *adornment* is kosmos which gives us our English words, cosmos – the ordered universe – and cosmetics – the ordering of the face.

And Peter highlights three kinds of cosmetic activities: braided hair, wearing jewelry and putting on dresses.

Now be careful here – Peter isn't forbidding anything. He is just prioritizing things.

There are people who have concluded from this text that a woman can't let her hair down in public – either braided or loose, for that matter – and they take their cue from this text. Others take this text to mean a woman can't wear jewelry in public either.

I was talking to my older brother a few days ago about this text and he told me of a ministry trip he took to Romania in the early 1990's. The churches were embroiled in division over whether or not a woman could wear a wedding

band in public and this text was at the heart of the debate. Churches were literally splitting over the interpretation and application of this passage. Many of them believed Peter was forbidding any kind of jewelry – and wedding bands were jewelry and thus forbidden.

Well, if we apply this verse consistently, if Peter is forbidding a woman from braiding her hair and wearing jewelry, he is also forbidding a woman from wearing a dress, and I doubt he's doing that.

The original word Peter uses for *braiding* occurs in the New Testament only here in this verse.

It is not a reference to a hair style as much as it is a reference to the time and activity of braiding. This wasn't a couple of pig tails and you are out the door.

This kind of braiding Peter refers to took hours of time and attention and in Peter's day it had become a public, iconic display of wealth and leisure. It set you apart.

Again, Peter doesn't forbid it. He is not concerned with pig tails; he is concerned about priorities.

Notice further along, the word he uses for wearing gold jewelry. The word for *wearing*, again, is rare – found only here – and it can be translated *putting around*.

This wasn't just a gold ring. This, again, was an ostentatious display of wealth.

Isaiah provides a rare look into the use of jewelry and other ornaments women wore when he wrote that the practice included wearing expensive bells on their sandals, wearing jewelry around their ankles, wearing multiple bracelets on their wrists and upper arms and necks, wearing finger rings, nose rings, and dangling earrings (Isaiah 3).

In other words, you didn't just *see* these women coming, you *heard* them coming a mile away.

Isaiah's description, and Peter's description as well, is of a woman who loads on the jewelry and gets attention, not because of who she is, but because of what she owns and because of how she looks.

The jewelry might change through the centuries, but the principle warning remains the same: women, be careful in what you wear. Be careful in how you get attention. Be careful in what you are communicating through what you wear. Don't wear your wealth on your sleeve. Don't show off – especially in the church. And outside the church assembly, don't demonstrate that your priorities are focused on the physical.

The third adornment mentioned by Peter at the end of verse 3 is **putting on dresses**. This doesn't mean that you can't wear a beautiful dress; and by the way, Peter isn't telling Christian women to look unkempt or unattractive either. That's not his point.

The words Peter uses here refer to the idea of wearing extravagant clothing for the sake of showing off – and in this context – it carries the idea of gaining attention for all the wrong reasons.

Peter isn't forbidding any of this – the braided hair, jewelry and nice clothes; but he is about to redefine what is truly beautiful, what is really worthy of getting attention. In fact, he is about to tell the women in the assembly that true beauty is more than skin deep!

Having said what not to focus on, Peter moves on to tell women where to put their time and energy.

Notice **verse 4. *But let it be the hidden person of the heart.***

Stop for a moment. The word for **heart** here is *kardia* – it is the seat of who you really are. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7).

In biblical terms, the heart is the regenerated nature. This is the place where the Holy Spirit's inner work of grace is accomplished, one author writes, *and true beauty becomes real and long-lasting.*^v

So Peter is contrasting the physical world, the cosmos, with the spiritual world, the *kardia*. Peter is playing on words. He is drawing a contrast between cosmetics and *kardia*; the public world and the private heart.

And he is effectively telling women to focus on their heart; to get dressed up from the inside

out – first and foremost to spend more time grooming their hearts spiritually than grooming their hair and dressing their bodies physically.^{vi}

And just what should be developing in the privacy of your heart? Peter gives us two qualities.

Notice in verse 4, ***a gentle and quiet spirit.*** The word for **gentle** is a word that means gracious, or considerate. Kindness as opposed to being pushy and demanding.

By the way, gentleness is in the list of the fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5**, which means this isn't for women only, but men as well. We will get to the men eventually in this text.

Sometimes the word “gentle” is translated “meek” in the New Testament. It is a word used to describe Jesus Christ as well in **Matthew 11:29**.

Meekness doesn't mean weakness. It is actually power under control; it is emotion under control.

So Peter isn't recommending that women become doormats, or open to abuse. He isn't suggesting that women can't share their minds or their opinions.^{vii}

In fact, Jesus was known by this same quality and He definitely spoke His mind and shared His opinion.

But the Lord was never out of control; He was always intentional and purposeful.

Peter adds the second quality for internal development. He adds, ***a quiet spirit.*** She is quiet.

Actually, this doesn't mean that she never makes a sound. The word Peter uses here is a word that relates to peace. She is literally at peace.

In fact, one Greek dictionary, known to seminary students simply as Kittle, describes this word as *someone who calmly bears the disturbances created by others without creating a disturbance themselves.*^{viii}

And when you think about the immediate context, this inner quality is absolutely critical – and absolutely dependent – upon the Holy Spirit.

Here is a believing wife, married to an obstinate man who cares nothing for the gospel and, as we have learned, wants nothing to do with it. And in this midst of this turmoil, she has a sense of internal peace.

Things around her are warlike and she is pursuing peace.^{ix}

Talk about the undeniable work of God! It is so unusual that her unbelieving husband won't be able to ignore the fact that something is different about her.

There is turmoil everywhere and she has this sense of graciousness and confidence.

For the woman who is wanting to demonstrate the power of the gospel to her disbelieving or disobedient husband, Peter says these are the qualities that are the most impossible to ignore.

The truth is, an unbelieving husband isn't going to take note of how many times you pray or how many chapters of the Bible you read or how many times you go to church. He is just going to notice the demeanor in how you go about not only the routine duties of life, but how you face the turmoil and difficulties around you.

Talk about attention grabbing for the right reason! Talk about different! Talk about beautiful!

An old proverb puts it this way: a woman whose smile is wide and whose expression is glad has a kind of beauty no matter what she wears.

This beauty is more than skin deep. Peter reminds these wives and every woman in the Body of Christ with truth that you are not going to get from television or a magazine or from Madison Avenue: the true essence of feminine beauty is not outward adornment, but inward attitudes that express themselves with kindness and confidence.^x

You can't buy these qualities of beauty. They aren't sold over the counter. You can't find them on sale. In fact, they can't be purchased at all. They are developed by the Spirit of God down deep – deep down below the skin, inside the hidden person of the heart. That is where true beauty is developed.

Next, Peter writes that these two qualities of gentleness and quietness are unique for two reasons. Notice earlier in *verse 4* – Peter writes that these qualities are *imperishable*.

In simple terms, this is stuff that lasts. What is in fashion will eventually go out of fashion, but this never will! It is *imperishable*.

That is another way of saying – these qualities will never go out of style.^{xi}

The word *imperishable* literally means *unfading*.^{xii}

In other words, Peter is telling women of all ages, “here is a beauty that will never fade away.”

Everything about us is getting older, even if we try to deny it. The temporary is fading away, no matter how young we still see ourselves.

Someone sent me this in an email some time ago: a woman was sitting in the waiting room for her first appointment with a new dentist. She noticed his DDS diploma, which bore his full name. Suddenly, she remembered that a tall, handsome, dark-haired young man with the same name had been in her high school class so many years ago. She wondered, *Could this Dentist be the same guy I had a crush on way back then?*

She quickly discarded any such thought when he came into the room. He was slightly bent over; a balding, gray-haired man with deep wrinkles in his face. *He's way too old to have been my classmate*, she thought to herself.

Still, after he examined her teeth, she asked, “Did you happen to attend Morgan Park High School?”

“Yes! And I'm still a Morgan Mustang,” he said with school pride.

“Well,” she asked, “When did you graduate?”

He replied, “In 1959 . . . why do you ask?”

She said, “I knew you looked familiar – you were in my class!”

“Really?” he said, looking at her closely. “What class did you teach?”

Again, Peter is reminding his audience – don't focus on something that is fading away, something that requires more and more cosmetics. Focus instead on dressing your heart.

Allow the inner working of the Spirit of God to produce character because character doesn't fade away. It's the stuff that lasts.

Secondly, these qualities are not only imperishable,

2. Peter writes, notice the last part of *verse 4 – the quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.*

This word for *precious* doesn't mean, "Well, isn't that sweet." No, this is a word that means valuable; costly; even priceless.

Again, this is a play on words. While the world lavishes money on stuff with high price tags, God informs us that the most valuable things in life are not in your wardrobe; they are in your heart.

A gentle/gracious and quiet/calm spirit are those qualities that God has stamped the highest price tag upon.

Let me encourage the men in the assembly. Make sure you are modeling the heart of God by placing less value and attention on a woman's figure or face and more value on her faith and on her faithfulness to Christ and His church.

I'm sure it would be an immense help to our sisters in Christ to act out this shift in value. Let's not repeat the world's obsession for the body. It has come at a terrible cost for women, the sense of never looking good enough, never being pretty enough, never measuring up, feeling inferior, ugly, unlovable. Men, let's make sure that we don't imitate the world's value system by encouraging women to focus on the wrong things.

Let me wrap up this study by making three observations. Here is what Peter is saying to wives and to women in general:

First, what matters most about you will never be hanging in your closet or tucked away in a jewelry box.

In other words, what matters most has nothing to do with style; it has everything to do with your spirit.

It has nothing to do with less wrinkles or newer clothes or shinier jewelry.

That stuff isn't eternally valuable. What the Spirit of God is developing in your heart as fruit of the Spirit of God is priceless.

Secondly, what impacts your husband – and the rest of the world for the matter – and brings God great glory – isn't your appearance, but your attitude.

Peter is talking specifically about graciousness and calmness.

Thirdly, what the world pursues with great obsession is temporary. What the Christian pursues with great passion is eternal.

Perhaps you have noticed your natural inclination to size people up when you meet someone new at the job or in the classroom.

Whenever you meet them for the first time, you take an immediate physical inventory. It is unconscious – you don't make it obvious – but you take note of their face, their accent, their clothing and maybe even their shoes.

It starts young. I have talked to teachers of elementary students and they have told me that by the first grade, everybody is rated for what they wear and what they own and how they talk, from the kind of backpack to the kind of shoes and name brands of shirts. In fact, if you don't have a smart phone by the third grade, you are obviously a nobody.

We are supposed to grow out of this kind of inventory, right?! This is the old way of thinking. This is the world's way of sizing people up!

And have you noticed that after you get to really know someone – no matter what that earlier mental inventory was like – have you noticed that over time, those physical things, those external attributes don't even register as important anymore?

After you get to know them, you measure their value by their personality, their work ethic, their response to difficulties and pressures and hard work. You couldn't care less anymore what kind of shoes they are wearing – unless you want to borrow them. You don't care what kind of car they pulled up in; that doesn't define who they really are.

You see, the world out there never gets past that initial inventory. It is still all about clothes and fashion and complexion and style. They never get past the temporary. Listen, beloved, apart from Jesus Christ, a person never gets any further than skin deep. To them, everything will always be about fashion and figure and face.

To God, what matters most is heart and character and spirit.

With that in mind, let's take a quick inventory of our own schedule. Let's look in the spiritual mirror today – and this inventory is for men and women alike. Let me invite you to bow your heads and close your eyes. Forget anyone else is around you and let's think about this coming week. Let's think about these three or four questions quickly.

How much time will you spend grooming your face, compared to the time you will spend grooming your faith?

How much effort will you make this week working on external things, compared to the effort you will make working on your internal things? They are not bad things or forbidden things – they are just temporary things.

How much time will you spend this week exercising your body at the gym, compared to the time you will spend exercising your spirit in God's Word?

One more: Is there room left in your schedule to work on priceless things?

Let me encourage you, as a believer, to plan for regular exercise in the Word this week. Make sure gentleness/graciousness and quietness/calmness are part of that internal workout that takes place deep down – much deeper than skin deep – down deep in your heart.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 8/13/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Westminster, 1976), p. 221

ii Adapted from David Helm, *1-2 Peter and Jude* (Crossway, 2008), p. 103

iii Statistics quoted from Juan Sanchez, *1 Peter for You* (The Good Book Company, 2016), p. 115

iv Ibid

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- v D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH, 1984), p. 200
- vi Adapted from Black, p. 104
- vii Adapted from R.C. Sproul, 1-2 Peter (Crossway, 2011), p. 95
- viii Quoted by Hiebert, p. 201
- ix Sanchez, p. 119
- x Adapted from Daniel Powers, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude (Beacon Hill Press, 2010), p. 108
- xi Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter (Zondervan, 2010), p. 188
- xii The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 13, (Zondervan, 2006), p. 328