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1 Peter 3:3–5 and Plutarch on the Virtue of Modesty for Women

The First Letter of Peter offers the following counsel for women:

Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. (1 Pet. 3:3–5)

The Roman world in general prized modesty and simplicity as primary virtues for women. Thus Plutarch pulls out all the stops in offering this high praise to his wife:

Your plainness of attire and sober style of living has without exception amazed every philosopher who has shared our society and intimacy, neither is there any townsman of ours to whom at religious ceremonies, sacrifices, and the theatre you do not offer another spectacle—your own simplicity. (*Moralia*, “Consolation to His Wife” 609C)¹

1. Plutarch, *Moralia*, “Consolation to His Wife,” trans. Frank Cole Babbitt. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 589.