

Recognizing True Beauty

By Jon Powell

Our culture is constantly projecting its ideas of beauty, bombarding us with motion images, sounds & displays of what it considers ideal. Further refinements of its notions of beauty come in many feminine flavors, very strongly projected by numerous men's magazines and fashion shows (of which we will leave nameless). Obviously, the subjects of many of these projections are women whom we really don't know beyond what our eyes can see. The observer is often left pondering: is this all there is? Is only what the eye can perceive truly worthwhile?

The casual observer might agree with these assertions as he observes and feels the "gravitational" effects and sees the incredible prices paid to acquire the various forms (including feminine) of beauty in our culture. Just looking at some of the "rocks" gracing the world's most famous super-models, as they careen from relationship to relationship reveal a tangible price tag. Our observer, as he gains knowledge from these experiences would hopefully move deeper in his analysis of beauty. He would also realize that beauty is a strong motivator and could be a great consumer of his personal treasure, and that correct conclusions on this matter are of utmost importance to his health, finances, personal happiness, life satisfaction and even eternal destiny.

The purpose of this brief essay is not to compete with the huge volume of excellent books on the subject of feminine beauty and the development of virtue, but to provide a clear definition of true beauty so that it can be recognized, cultivated and ultimately rewarded. We will make the assertion that true beauty will result in lasting, deep and positive effects, while distorted images of beauty will prove to be empty, unsatisfying, rapidly depreciating and ultimately worthless.

Beauty can be defined as those qualities intrinsic to an individual or object that contribute to its great appeal and value. Those who value gemstones take into account many factors in assaying their subject: color, cut, clarity, weight and rarity. So it is with assessing feminine beauty: women occur in all shapes, sizes and possess varying temperaments and abilities. Is there a single outward standard for assaying beauty, or is it much more complex process, taking into account the full compliment of physical, emotion, spiritual aspects of an entire being? Our observer comes to an even more complex and deeper realization of beauty as he considers divine revelation.

To the uninitiated, it may come as a surprise that the Bible is not silent about beauty. Alongside such weighty subjects as truth, justice, morals and meaning, the specific topic of feminine beauty is covered in at least two

"passages of full mention," 1 Peter 3 and Proverbs 31--classic sections of Scripture of which most every Christian woman is aware. As we explore this topic further, we also see that the Creator's views on the topic come into sharp contrast with what we see exalted by the people and powers of this world.

First, true beauty emanates from the inside. Just as large internal flaws devalue a large gemstone, so is a woman who weighs in with great personal charms, strength of motivation or physical beauty, yet lacks critical internal substance. In 1 Peter 3:3-4 we are directed toward the inward attributes of a woman.

"Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight." [NASB]

A godly woman's beauty begins on the inside, radiating outwards creating true beauty. While physical beauty is never condemned in the Bible, it is made very clear that it is temporary and of lesser importance in defining a woman's value. The value of a woman in the world, as we know, is based on what appears outside, rarely correlating to what is on the inside. Rather, the inside of many ungodly women is a bossy, brash & profane persona that is the opposite of the gentle & quiet spirit of the Biblical woman.

Proverbs 31 is the account of a concerned mother advocating true beauty to her princely son. Since the passage is lengthy, we will summarize the key points, without direct quotes:

- Her foundation is her character: she can be trusted to manage herself, which includes her affections, emotions, commitments, money and time. She does not leave herself open to ungodly accusations, and realizes that her life should be lived seeking praise from the God who sees every thought, attitude and deed.
- She is industrious: from dawn to dusk she makes the most of her time, knowing that it is one of her most valuable assets. Her work ethic results in tangible profits for her family and community.
- She astutely assesses value: by prior experience and research she can assess the real value of an item, including its quality, cost and utility. Due to her knowledge of prices and raw materials she is able to quickly perform make/buy decisions for items that are truly needed by her family, household and community.
- She cultivates powers of observation: she studies the character & needs of her husband, family, workers, community & investments to optimally apply her resources. She vigilantly watches her responsibilities over time, knowing that things change.

- She is others-centered: she is not obsessed over her personal needs, rather because she is observant, she uses her resources to appropriately meet the needs of those around her. She observes priorities in whose needs she meets first: her husband, family, church and community.
- She presents herself in a refined manner: as contrasted to the loose woman, she dresses in an appropriate, yet not cheap or austere manner. She keeps physically fit, and her personal grooming and attire provide the frame for her inner beauty. As a result she is perceived as a woman of integrity, grace and beauty.
- She speaks wisely: she has a treasure of knowledge from which she draws to communicate truth according to the needs of her hearers. She does not hesitate to gently rebuke in love, and that same love leads her to continually edify her family via insightful compliments. She knows that her words create life and death, confidence and discouragement. The achievements of her husband can be traced to her intimate encouragement.
- She anticipates upcoming seasons: knowing that there are distinct periods in life, she looks ahead so that she is already prepared when circumstances change. She knows that the climate, the value of items and even life are cyclic, and she plans accordingly. She maximizes her profits and effectiveness by buying and preparing out of season, and then selling and reaping well in season.

These attributes are comprehensive and are meant to present the ultimate goal for feminine virtue (the fully ripe fruit). They are not meant to discourage a woman who is in process. However, once a woman has this true knowledge she will be confronted with a series of difficult choices: how will she present herself, how will she use her time, and will she live for herself or others? The godly woman counts the cost and effort she must exert to develop her character and her ministry.

The end result for a woman that walks in this manner, with these attributes ever increasing, is that she becomes a treasure of the highest value. She will necessarily obtain the praise of those who know her well, and especially of the God who knows her best.

Let us then be faithful to recognize, encourage and reward the development and attainment of godly feminine virtue in those around us. As our women ascend these heights, our families, churches and culture will never be the same.

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