

Does Physical Beauty Matter?

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This message is one our culture preaches in earnest to girls and women, beginning in earliest childhood. It comes at us from virtually every angle: television, movies, music, magazines, books, and advertisements. In nearly perfect unison, they paint for us a picture of what really matters. And what matters most for women, they insist, is beauty—physical beauty. Even parents, siblings, teachers, and friends sometimes add unwittingly to the chorus: “darling” children get oohs, aahs, and doting attention, while less attractive, overweight, or gangly children may be the objects of unkind comments, indifference, or even overt rejection.

I believe that our preoccupation with external appearance goes back to the first woman. Do you remember what it was that appealed to Eve about the forbidden fruit?

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and *pleasing to the eye*, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.” (Gen. 3 :6, italics added)

The fruit had a functional appeal (it was “good for food”); it also appealed to her desire for wisdom. But equally important was the fact that it was “pleasing to the eye”—it was physically attractive.

The Enemy succeeded in getting the woman to value physical appearance more highly than less visible qualities, such as trust and obedience. The problem wasn’t that the fruit was “beautiful”—God had made it that way. Nor was it wrong for Eve to enjoy and appreciate the beauty of God’s creation. The problem was that Eve placed undue emphasis on external appearance. In doing so, she believed and acted on a lie. The priority Eve placed on physical attractiveness became the accepted pattern for all human beings.

From that moment on, she and her husband saw themselves and their physical bodies through different eyes. They became self-conscious and ashamed of their bodies—bodies that had been masterfully formed by a loving Creator. They immediately sought to cover up their bodies, afraid to risk exposure before one another.

The deception that physical beauty is to be esteemed above beauty of heart, spirit, and life leaves both men and women feeling unattractive, ashamed, embarrassed, and hopelessly flawed.

Ironically, the pursuit of physical beauty is invariably an unattainable, elusive goal—always just out of reach.

One might ask, how much damage can it do to place inordinate value on physical, external beauty? Let's go back to our premise: What we believe ultimately determines how we live. If we believe something that is not true, sooner or later we will act on that lie; believing and acting on lies leads us into bondage.

Each of the following women *believed* something about beauty that is not true. What they *believed* impacted the way they *felt* about themselves and caused them to make *choices* that placed them in *bondage*.

"I believed that outward beauty (my body) was all that was valuable about me to anyone, especially men. I chose to take advantage of that to get the attention I so desperately craved. I became a sexual addict."

"I have a beautiful sister, whom I adore, but I am plain. I have always believed myself to be inferior and that I must perform to be accepted by others. I see the beautiful people get the breaks in life. I just accept that I won't, and I am in bondage to my perception of my appearance."

"All my life I have believed that my self-worth was based on my appearance, and of course I never looked like the world said I should, so I have always had a low self-worth. I developed eating disorders, am a food addict, and struggle in my marriage with the perception that I am not attractive, and that my husband is always looking at other women who are attractive to him."

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Comparison, envy, competitiveness, promiscuity, sexual addictions, eating disorders, immodest dress, flirtatious behavior—the list of attitudes and behaviors rooted in a false view of beauty is long. What can set women free from this bondage? Only the Truth can overcome the lies we have believed. God’s Word tells us the Truth about the transitory nature of physical beauty and the importance of pursuing lasting, inner beauty:

“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” (Prov. 31:30)

“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. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.” (1 Peter 3 :3-5)

These verses do not teach, as some might think, that physical beauty is somehow sinful, or that it is wrong to pay any attention to our outward appearance. That is just as much a deception as the lie that places an overemphasis on external beauty.

Nowhere does the Scripture condemn physical beauty or suggest that the outward appearance does not matter. What is condemned is taking pride in God-given beauty, giving excessive attention to physical beauty, or tending to physical matters while neglecting matters of the heart.

One of Satan’s strategies is to get us to move from one extreme to another. There is a growing aversion in our culture to neatness, orderliness, and attractiveness in dress and physical appearance. I sometimes find myself wanting to say to Christian women: “Do you know who you are? God made you a woman. Accept His gift. Don’t be afraid to be feminine and to add physical and spiritual loveliness to the setting where He has placed you. You are a child of God. You are a part of the bride of Christ. You belong to the King—you are royalty. Dress and conduct

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yourself in a way that reflects your high and holy calling. God has called you out of this world's system—don't let the world press you into its mold. Don't think, dress, or act like the world; inwardly and outwardly, let others see the difference He makes in your life."

We as Christian women should seek to reflect the beauty, order, excellence, and grace of God through both our outward and inner person.

The Christian wife has even more reason to find the right balance in this matter. The "virtuous wife" of Proverbs 31 is physically fit and well dressed (vv. 17, 22). She is a compliment to her husband.

If a wife dresses in a way that is slovenly and unkempt, if she does not take any care for her physical appearance, she reflects negatively on her husband (and on her heavenly Bridegroom).

Further, if she makes no effort to be physically attractive for her husband, you may be sure another woman out there will be standing in line to get his attention.

When the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about how things ought to be in the church, he took time to address the way women dress. His instructions show the balance between the inner heart attitude of the woman and her outer attire and behavior. Paul exhorts women to,

"Adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." (1 Tim. 2 : 9-10 NKJV)

The words translated "adorn" and "modest" in this text mean "orderly, well-arranged, decent"; they speak of "harmonious arrangement."

The outward appearance of the Christian woman is to reflect a heart that is simple, pure, and well-ordered; her clothing and hairstyles should not be distracting or draw attention to herself by being

extravagant, extreme, or indecent. In this way, she reflects the true condition of her heart and her relationship with the Lord, and she makes the Gospel attractive to the world.

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