



Looking Good

Everybody in the world wants to look good. Sometimes it is said that especially young people are worried about appearances, but most older people are similarly interested in their image. Just walk through a drug store and survey the immense quantity of goods, all designed to help us look and smell just right. There are gels, hairsprays, shampoos, soaps, perfumes, and colognes, together with make-up of a hundred varieties. In addition, every decent mall boasts at least two department stores and dozens of clothing boutiques where people can stock up on the latest trend items.

As I said, people are definitely interested in their image. They want to feel good and look good in order to get a positive response from other people. We live in a land of mirrors, designed to help us look our best, to keep on top of our image. Now, do not get me wrong. I am not mentioning all these points so as to blast away at the modern obsession with surface looks.

It is true that people are obsessed with their appearance. In addition, it is true that much of what passes for style these days is really, only the absence of style—shapeless and uniform. Everybody looks the same. It is true that much of what is glorified in advertising is only thinly disguised, if at all, sensuality — forbidden to the Christian. Modesty never has a great following. Humanistic culture is always obsessed with the external — because that is all it has!

Still, it is not unchristian to try to look your best. On the one hand, people have to learn to be content with their appearance, but on the other hand, it is perfectly acceptable to make yourself as attractive as possible. Who wants to be sloppy and shapeless, drab and dull? We may care for, dress up, and adorn the creation of God in our bodies.

According to Scripture, however, real beauty starts within. Unless you have this inner beauty, your outer beauty will be just a hollow facade. However, if you do have this loveliness of the heart, then even an average appearance will radiate and positively glow—yes, it will shine with the beauty of holiness.

Mere outer beauty or good looks are passing. Even the loveliest models get old, and what is worse, they too, die! No cosmetics can stop or disguise that ugly reality. Earthly beauty is transient and those who have put the emphasis on the external will one day find that they have made a very poor investment. As Scripture states:

"All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls." (Isaiah 40:6-8).

Real beauty starts in the heart. It starts in a heart that has been transformed by God's power. If you want to be truly beautiful, you will need to consider the state of your heart. Even a perfect complexion cannot hide the bitter reality that the human heart is ugly. Although human beings were created in the image of God — like Him in moral perfection and beauty — the race has fallen into sin. Moreover, sin makes people ugly. Instead of living before God in the beauty of holiness, people's hearts are warped and twisted by the power of sin.

Although made in the image of God, reflecting His glory and holiness, the "natural" state of man is now one of extreme ugliness. However, the Good News of the Bible is that something can be done about this bad situation. You can become beautiful! You can again look good to God. You can again be His glorious image on earth.

The Bible teaches us that we need to be and can be transformed. In Romans 12:2, the apostle says:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

We could translate Paul's words more literally to read like this: Be metamorphosed by the renewal of your mind. Right now, it is the season for butterflies. These insects, as you know, go through an incredible change in form and structure. First, they hatch from eggs to become little caterpillars (larvae). Then they spin a cocoon to become pupae. Quietly and imperceptibly a miracle takes place in that capsule! Suddenly, one fine spring day, the newly formed butterfly breaks from its enclosure, sits in the sun to dry its wings, and away it flies — stunning in beauty and majesty.

The word for this whole process is metamorphosis. In addition, Paul is saying that the same thing happens to Christians. In the course of life, they must undergo revolutionary change. From a being which was born and conceived in sin, twisted and marred by the power of evil — unspeakably ugly in the sight of heaven—from that not very promising beginning must come a new creature, reformed, reshaped in the image of God — beautiful and acceptable in the sight of heaven, a fit inhabitant for a renewed earth.

Yes, we must become beautiful to God. Everybody is very concerned about how they appear to other people. Nevertheless, it is high time that we start getting concerned about how we appear to God. While we might be able to hide or compensate for our physical blemishes so that others do not even notice them, we cannot hide a thing from God. Before Him, every creature lies open. He reads us like an open book. The kind of beauty that will impress Him must be genuine, a real beauty that starts in the heart.

Well, then, how does a person attain this kind of beauty? How do we become good looking to God? First, let me say that God finds us acceptable and beautiful only when we are joined to Christ by a true faith. Through faith, we become one with Christ, so that His righteousness and holiness become our righteousness and holiness. The same kind of thing happens when you get married. As a new and single entity, you share all things. If your husband is rich, so are you! Well, our Husband is very rich. He possesses perfect righteousness and holiness. Whatever He has is ours — by faith! Because we are one with Christ, God declares that we are righteous. We may be called saints — holy people, adorned with the white garments of salvation.

The whole Bible addresses believers as saints. But in this life, saints are not perfect. Even their best works are defiled (made ugly) by sin. We do not always look that good in fact, even though in principle we are holy in Christ. We are justified — declared holy through faith in Christ. However, we still need to be sanctified — which means that we need to be made holy in fact—in our daily life of thought, word and action. We have to learn to be what we are in Christ — so that more and more we come to resemble Him in holiness.

This sanctification is a process. We could say that we Christians are under construction. We are being renovated. Ongoing transformation is both the demand and the possibility of Christian life. What does it take? It takes the discipline of a lifetime — starting when you are young. To be beautiful for God means that you will have to fight against your old nature. It means that you need to self-consciously pattern yourself on the Word — so that more and more your thoughts, words, and actions are in harmony with the will of God. You can be adorned with the beauty of holiness, but only by constantly putting away the thoughts and habits which come naturally to you and replacing them with the supernatural fruit of the Spirit (Galatians.5:22-24).

The challenge of getting your face and hair ready to meet the world pales in comparison to this calling. It is hard to be holy. It takes perseverance and a steady eye on the final goal. It takes a spirit of prayer. It takes faithful attention to the Word. However, it can be done — in God's power. In addition, the rewards are very great.

When you're young, outer beauty may seem to be the only reality. But it fades away—sooner than you think. On the other hand, inner beauty is lasting. Looking good to God is a treasure which not even sickness, old age, or death can take away. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:

"Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day."

A local outlet of the Randy River clothing chain displays a sign reading: It's not who you are, it's how you look. Of course, that is advertising, but for many it is also a philosophy of life. What is important is the surface. However, for us the thing that counts is that we are beautiful to God — inwardly.

Let us work for that unfading beauty of holiness. We can be changed, transformed. We can reflect the beauty of God. To quote Paul again:

"And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians. 3:18).

The crowning step of this metamorphosis is that also our mortal bodies will be made like the glorious body of Christ (Philippians. 3:20, 21). Nevertheless, that total physical perfection is only the end of a process that starts today — in the heart, in a life of holiness. Looking good begins and ends with being holy.

R Schouten

© 2010
www.christianstudylibrary.org