

Modesty in Beautifying the Body and the Soul

Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Peter 3:3-4

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Greg L. Price

How our society worships physical beauty. The pictures of the beautiful idols which our society worships are plastered all over magazines, on television, and on our computers. As a result, there are people (young and old alike) “falling in love” and emotionally involved with these living, breathing idols whom they have never even met. On what basis do their hearts go after these stars? On the basis of their outward beauty, for they certainly do not know them.

King Solomon (the wisest mere man that ever lived) has stated so well the truth of the matter: “Beauty is vain” Proverbs 31:30 i.e. physical beauty is a vapor. Outward beauty is only skin deep. It is transitory and changeable. Outward beauty is vanishing. The beauty upon which we ought to be truly focused is the beauty of the Lord (now that is true beauty) and the beauty of the Lord that is within the Christian and is seen in our love for Jesus Christ, for His gospel, for His commandments, and for one another. That is a beauty that does not fade away with time, but rather becomes all the more beautiful with the passing of time.

The temptation we face in focusing our attention upon mere outward beauty is one that comes to most of us, wherein our outward appearance before man is of greater esteem in our estimation than our inward appearance before God. This is just another bodily temptation (like that of drunkenness and other bodily addictions) that will overwhelm the Christian if we are not growing in the fruit of temperance/self-control.

The main points for the sermon this Lord’s Day are: (1) Bringing Outward Beauty under the Control of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 3:3); (2) Growing the Incorruptible Fruit of Inward Beauty (1 Peter 3:4).

I. Bringing Outward Beauty under the Control of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 3:3).

A. The Apostle Peter sends this inspired letter to those scattered Christians (many of whom are Jewish) living in the Roman Provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappodocia, Asia, and Bithynia. As was the usual literary order of the apostolic letters, the first part of 1 Peter focuses on the doctrine of the gospel, and that which follows focuses on the application of the gospel to the persecution these Christians were enduring and to living a holy life in the various relationships of family, church, and community. As we come to the third chapter of 1 Peter (verses 1-6), the relationship of the wife to her husband is addressed, which is followed by the relationship of the husband to the wife (in verse 7). Our attention is now focused upon what Peter writes concerning the matter of outward appearance and dress in 1 Peter 3:3 and that which Peter states is fitting for a godly wife. Though the immediate context is related to wives and their outward appearance, let none of us think for a moment that the general principles drawn out in these verses have nothing to do with men, for they are applicable to men as to women.

B. Though the specific Greek word for temperance/self-control in Galatians 5:23 (*egkrateia*) is not used in 1 Peter 3:3-4, the thrust of these verses is that what is to characterize the Christian woman (and man) is not a preoccupation with beautifying the physical body, but rather a preoccupation with beautifying the inward heart. In order for the Christian to turn from that which the world idolizes to that which is of great price in God’s sight will require in the Christian the work of God’s Spirit in growing the fruit of temperance/self-control. Like the temptation to be drawn to a bodily excess in what we eat and drink (as we saw in the previous sermon on the Fruit of the Spirit), so there is the temptation to be drawn to a bodily

excess in our bodily appearance. When the wall of self-control is not fortified and standing firmly against such bodily temptations, we will be given over to an abuse and unlawful use of our bodies to become a billboard advertising ourselves, rather than a living letter pointing people to Jesus Christ.

C. The Apostle Peter gives to us a contrast in these verses: in verse 3, what Christian women (and by application, Christian men) are not to give themselves over to; but in verse 4, what Christian women (and by application, Christian men) are to give themselves over to. As we shall see, Peter is not issuing some absolute prohibition against all outward beauty or outward adornment, but is issuing a warning, that we must be careful not to make our outward appearance an idol to us, while at the same time ignoring, neglecting, and rejecting the imperishable beauty of fearing God, and growing in a meek and quiet spirit. Dear ones, being consumed with our body and our appearance before man always indicates an emptiness in the heart for the beauty of the Lord. Those who are preoccupied with the outward man (to the neglect of the inward man) are crying out for the world to notice them, to applaud them, to give them approval. It is an evidence that there is much lacking by way of an inward beauty of the Lord. Beloved, Christian modesty is not first and foremost an issue of outward appearance, but is rather first and foremost an issue of the gospel of Jesus Christ being received by faith alone and being lived out in the entire life of the Christian (in thoughts, words, behavior, and appearance). We may profess the gospel with our lips, but we may at the same time deny the gospel by our outward speech, our outward behavior, and our outward appearance (Titus 1:16: "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him").

D. The Apostle Peter specifically states in 1 Peter 3:3 that a Christian woman is not to be characterized and known by three outward adornments: her lavish hairdo ("plaiting the hair"), her showy, expensive jewelry ("wearing of gold"), or her clothing ("putting on of apparel"). In other words, if those in the church or those in the world were asked how they would describe you, would they be immediately drawn to describe you by your hairstyle, your jewelry, your clothing (or any other bodily adornment), or would they be first drawn to describe you by your Christian character, godliness, and love for Christ. These excessive outward adornments of which Peter here speaks are such that they are crying out, "Look at me"; "Look how beautiful/handsome/cool I am." To be known by our hairdo, our jewelry, and our clothing is to become a poster-child for self, rather than for Christ.

1. **The plaiting of the hair** refers to the extravagant weaving of the hair up and up and up on the head as a more extreme fashion of that time, forming as it were a tower that at once gained the attention of all who observed her. It is not that hair is forbidden from being an adornment, but rather that the hair (whether on a woman or a man) ought not to be a billboard advertising ourselves.

2. **The wearing of gold** has the idea of wrapping much gold (and other precious stones) around the hair, the neck, the wrist, in a showy spectacle. Once again, the idea is not that it is sinful in itself to wear jewelry, but that jewelry not be abused, so that it is the jewelry that people see rather than a Christian whose heart and affection supremely belong to Christ.

3. **The putting on of apparel** is necessary to clothe the body (as God did with Adam and Eve clothe their nakedness), but the Christian life does not consist of the latest fashions, designer clothes, dressing extravagantly, or dressing with a view to expose one's nakedness. The Christian life consists in surrendering all of our life to Christ in meekness that Christ might be seen in our behavior, and might be heard in our speech.

E. Dear ones, beauty is a good gift from God and there is nothing wrong with beauty in itself (whether it be beautiful people, beautiful mountains, beautiful cars, or beautiful music). God Himself has given us beauty in this world to appreciate, in order that we might worship the Creator of all such beauty (rather than the creature).

1. Many times God has caused his inspired writers to record in the pages of holy Writ the fact that a person was physically attractive (whether Sarah [Genesis 12:11], Rebekah [Genesis 24:16], Rachel [Genesis 29:17], David [1 Samuel 17:42], Abigail [1 Samuel 25:3], Bathsheba [2 Samuel 11:2], Absalom [2 Samuel 14:25], or Esther [Esther 1:11]). Had I lived at the time of these biblical characters, it would certainly not have been sinful for me to recognize and acknowledge their outward beauty since God Himself has stated this to be the case in His Word. Thus, it is not outward beauty that is wrong. For it is good and given by God. It is the abuse of outward beauty that is wrong. Outward beauty is wrong when it becomes an end in itself which we seek (whether in ourselves or in others), or when it becomes a means to some end of filling the emptiness or void in our lives, or an end to becoming popular, or an end to becoming accepted, or an end to becoming successful, or an end to getting what we want in life, an end to getting an attractive guy or girl, or an end to advertising ourselves rather than Christ.

2. Dear ones, whatever outward beauty you may have is not given to glorify yourself, but is given to glorify the Lord who gave it to you. Who do you want people to see above all when they look at you? Do you truly desire that they would see the God who has created you and redeemed you, or does that never even enter your mind in how you adorn yourself when you leave your house? If it is not God you want others to see in the way you conduct yourselves and in the way that you adorn yourself physically, then it must be merely yourself that you want them to see, which I would suggest is a form of idolatry in robbing God of His glory. You have cheated the Lord out of His praise.

3. Dear ones, outward adornment is not sinful in itself. Modest adornment that has a heart to please God and glorify God (and not to be a stumbling block to others) is beautiful, but when it is to show off our form, to show off our physique, to be a billboard for self, that adornment becomes ugly in the sight of God. Is it a sin in itself to use jewelry or cosmetics? Is caring for our physical bodies (by way of exercise, diet, and rest) unlawful in itself? No, as in all areas of life, it is not the use, but the abuse of such things that is sinful.

4. Let me give you some reasons why such outward adornment is not sinful in itself (though it may become sinful when abused).

a. The wearing of jewelry as a bodily adornment is not condemned in Scripture (Genesis 24:22—Rebekah; Exodus 32:2-3—Israel; Isaiah 61:10—figurative of God’s salvation; Ezekiel 16:11-13—figurative of the blessings given to Israel as God’s bride; Luke 15:22—figurative of the joy and blessing of one who comes to God). It is the abuse and excess that is condemned by Peter (1 Peter 3:3) and by Paul (1 Timothy 2:9-10).

b. Neither is the caring for one’s body with fragrant oils and lotions and cosmetics to beautify it not condemned in Scripture (Esther 2:12; Song of Solomon 3:6; Song of Solomon 4:10).

5. I agree with Calvin and many other Reformed commentators that what is condemned in 1 Peter 3:3 (and 1 Timothy 2:9) is not jewelry, fine clothing, or cosmetics in themselves, but the abuse wherein is exhibited an “excessive eagerness and desire to be richly dressed” (Calvin, *Commentary* on 1 Timothy 2:9). That is, to dress beyond one’s means and for the mere show of it. For Calvin rightly states: “And hence we ought to derive the rule of moderation; for, since dress is an indifferent matter, (as all outward matters are,) it is difficult to assign a fixed limit, how far we ought to go” (*Commentary* on 1 Timothy 2:9).

F. What are some guidelines we might use in adorning our bodies? Let me offer the following.

1. **Adorn your bodies to the glory of God** first and foremost (1 Corinthians 10:31). Do not dress in order to call attention to yourself, in order to impress others, or in order to flirt with others. Is God’s glory a consideration at all in the clothing, jewelry, or cosmetics you use? Not to do so for God’s glory is robbing God. For our body and spirit belong to the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). A biblical view of adornment cannot be separated from the gospel of Jesus Christ and His rule as Lord over your life.

2. **Adorn your bodies moderately.** In other words, do not go to extremes in fashions and

fads (as we read concerning those who dress in “strange apparel” Zephaniah 1:8). Don’t dress to look like this rock star or that movie star. Don’t make your bodily appearance an idol. Remember those whom you want to be like and those whom you want to look like reveal much about the desires of your own heart.

3. **Adorn your bodies modestly** (1 Timothy 2:9—*kosmios*—*kosmos*—cosmetics). Modesty refers to that which is well-ordered by both scriptural principles (in avoiding excesses and extremes) and well-ordered by cultural practices (for example, it would not be dressing modestly in this present cultural context for men to return to the robes worn in biblical times or the clothing of an earlier age—and likewise for the women).

a. Modesty in appearance is founded upon the change of heart wrought by the gospel of Jesus Christ and by the fruit of the Spirit and is manifested by dressing in such a way as not to draw attention to oneself (as if to say, “Look at me”), but rather to draw attention to Jesus Christ. There is no specific dress code given to us in Scripture.

b. However, there are general principles for our clothing: **covering our nakedness, avoiding that which draws attention to ourselves, and foregoing revealing and such tight clothing** (whether men or women) that may be the occasion of setting a temptation before our brothers or sisters (lust in mankind does not need any help at all— although none of us can ultimately prevent someone else from lusting, we should never encourage it by the way we dress).

4. **Adorn yourself with godly stewardship**: in both finances and time. Don’t buy what you cannot afford just to impress others. The Apostle Paul declares that we should not adorn ourselves with “costly array” (1 Timothy 2:9). However at the same time, it may be a better use of financial resources in the long run to buy that which is of a significantly superior quality (even if it is more expensive) than to buy that which is clearly of an inferior quality (even though it is less expensive).

5. **Adorn yourself for your health**. Don’t make your body an idol which you worship, but at the same time understand that the Bible does call us to treat the temple of the Holy Spirit with the proper stewardship that is befitting of God’s ownership of our bodies and our spirits (1 Timothy 4:8; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Though we must not allow our bodies to exercise mastery over our supreme love for Christ, the gospel, His commandments, and our neighbor, we should care for it by means of a healthy diet, exercise, and rest (otherwise we treat our body as merely belonging to us, and can abuse it however we choose—Exodus 20:13—“Thou shalt not kill”).

II. **Growing the Incorruptible Fruit of Inward Beauty (1 Peter 3:4).**

A. Dear ones, the root problem when the wall of self-control crumbles before the temptation to draw attention to our body, to our clothing, or to our jewelry is that we have failed to see the beauty of the Lord in all of His love, mercy, faithfulness, holiness, wisdom, and power, and therefore we have failed to grow in the fruit of the Spirit. The beauty of the body is more important to us than the beauty of Christ growing in us. We must come to see the idolatry of such love of outward beauty. For when we see the beauty of the Lord within us as that which supremely desire, pray for, and work for, there will be a biblical modesty given to the body instead of calling attention to it in becoming a billboard advertising ourselves.

B. The Apostle Peter, having admonished Christians to avoid the idolizing of the body (whether our own, or the body of others), now turns our attention to a beauty that doesn’t depend on youth or cosmetics or plastic surgery, because this beauty it is not external. It is a beauty that is “not corruptible” (1 Peter 3:4). It is a beauty that will last forever and ever (unlike our outward appearance which will falter and fail no matter how many visits we make to a beauty parlor, to a jewelry store, to a gym, or to a shopping mall). All that you buy will eventually wear out or go out of style. But a meek and quiet spirit will never wear out or go out of style in the sight of the Holy Trinity.

1. What makes a Christian woman truly beautiful? “The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Peter 3:4). Here, dear ladies, is a beauty that is even more beautiful when you’re 60 than when you were 20. This is how women become more beautiful the older they grow, and how women are more beautiful at the end of life than they were at the beginning of life.
2. The way to exercise self-control over bodily excesses is to grow in developing the fruit of the Spirit of which meekness and quietness are examples of the other fruit of the Spirit.
 - a. The fruit of meekness as we have noted is my power under God’s control. The fruit of self-control is the control of the Holy Spirit over self. It is my affections, my plans, my mouth, my eyes, my ears, my behavior, my body, my food and drink, my adornment and clothing, my possessions, and my relationships under the control of the Holy Spirit. It is the surrender of all that I am and all that I wear to the lordship of Jesus Christ.
 - b. The “quiet” spirit (in 1 Peter 3:4) is one in which the heart is not easily ruffled by the cares and concerns of life. Why? Because one fears the Lord—holds God in highest awe and wonder and takes Him seriously in both His promises and His commands. God is infinitely beautiful in all that He is and in all that He does when we fear Him. And this adornment is of great price in the sight of God, even if it is not in the sight of the world. And this godly character should be in the sight of those who court, become engaged, and are united in marriage. That inward beauty of the Lord, admired and cherished by both husband and wife, is the secret to a blessed relationship and marriage.

In conclusion, I leave you with the very fitting words of Jeff Pollard:

The cry of the Satanist is “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.” The cry of the 60s was “Do your own thing!” The cry of the Feminists is “It’s my body, and I’ll do what I want.” The cry of the modern Evangelical is “It’s my liberty, and I’ll do what I want.” Nevertheless, the declaration of Scripture is this: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1Co 6:19-20). You are not your own, if you are a Christian. Your whole being—body and soul—is the purchased property of Jesus Christ; and the price paid for your body was the breaking of His: “This is my body, which is broken for you” (1Co 11:24; Mat 26:26). Your body belongs to Him! He redeemed it with His precious blood on the cross of Calvary (“A Return to Modest Apparel” @ <http://www.chapellibrary.org/files/8113/7658/4056/mappfg.pdf>).

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