

The Bondage of Fashion and Beauty

By Jim Davis

Marketers, according to a recent article in Newsweek, have coined a new term for eight to fourteen year-olds. They are now called tweens. They are the largest number of their age group that have been around in several decades and they have not experienced poverty in their lifetime. A combination of affluence, multiple forms of media, and peer pressure are powerful factors that work to conform children into an early adulthood. Little girls are sold on sexy lingerie, provocative makeup, and clothes that speed them on the way to pressures they are not able to handle. Boys and girls have an appetite for the latest fashions and the group demands that you not only look but also act like the favored primetime characters.

Conformity is the same for any age group. When we try to gain the approval of others by shaping ourselves to a broken standard of values, we ultimately become very dissatisfied with our lives. Who we are becomes hopelessly lost in the world of what we want to be. Our purpose becomes confused with what others think we should do. Tyranny reigns triumphant as we grovel for the approval of others. But we are told in Romans 12:2, "be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." We are instructed to imitate Jesus Christ. Any comparison should not be with the outward appearance of others but with the inward character of Christ. The goal is always God's approval.

Giving too much attention to clothes and our outward appearance can be an attempt to cover who we really are with what we want to be or what others want us to be. Jesus said that we should not be anxious about what we eat or drink or wear for clothing (Matthew 6:31). It has been estimated that well over 90% of our young people are dissatisfied with their physical appearance. The present cultural standards for beauty are draining the life out of our youth. They are paralyzed by the fear of their unchangeable blemishes. They long for the features and unprincipled characteristics of the Hollywood set, thinking that there will be some lasting fulfillment from such vanity. The end of all such empty pursuit is despair.

Several years ago I was living in a suburban area outside of a large city. I witnessed first hand the shock that spread through a local high school when one of the peers committed suicide. He was intelligent. He was employed as a model. He wore the coolest clothes and he had all of the qualities our society preaches will bring one success. We have witnessed it many times when celebrities have reached the worldly pinnacle of success only to take their lives. We are always shocked. Yet their testimony screams that whatever it is that the masses are pursuing is not here. Looks do not determine our success. Success will be inseparably linked to Christ's control over our lives. "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

The Psalmist declares, "Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:13-14). Job said, "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about...Thou hast made me as the clay ..." (Job 10:8,9). Even though we may have defective features that are the result of the sinful fall of mankind, God's plan for our lives includes all of our blemishes. Do you wish for God-given athletic abilities? Do you hate your wide

hips? Do others constantly remind you how big your ears are? Are you lamenting the fact that you have to study so hard just to pass when your friend does not study at all and is at the top of the class? Satan wants to convince you that God has cheated you out of what you deserve in life. The ploy is always the same. "You are the one that should be in control of your destiny." "You should have knowledge of good and evil." "You should be as God."

Satisfaction however, will come not when we experience outward beauty and personal control of our life. It comes when we experience the inward beauty of the control of Christ's character within us. God is concerned with your inward character. Man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Maybe your defect is a God given reminder about the things that really matter. Perhaps God intended to motivate you to develop inward qualities. Maybe your defect was a gift to guard you against the vain pursuits of life. The individual is called away from conformity and he is called to transformation that he may prove the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. God created you and shaped you while you were yet in your mother's womb. The cost of redemption also declares your worth. "...you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). God desires to continue to shape you into the image of His Son Jesus Christ. You are His message to others. Your defects are powerful opportunities to glorify God.

It is good to groom yourself and wear nice clothes. You should correct any defects you possibly can. But when you face something that you cannot change, exercise faith in God. Try to recognize any ungratefulness or latent anger toward God and replace it with faith in His plan for your life. Put yourself in His hands and ask Him to make those things that bother you the most into a blessing. Thanksgiving is an expression of your faith in God.