

## **Satan's Long War on Beauty**

Does it matter how we dress? What about where we live and how our surroundings look? Do these things affect us? Obviously, yes. Of course.

Now, if that's the case, why is it so easy to find people who dress down and make every excuse to do so, even among otherwise intelligible people who can rightly discern so many other things?

To start off, let us clearly assert the fact is yes. Unequivocally, it does matter a great deal how we style ourselves and the world around us, just as all the things we see and take in with our eyes every day without a doubt affect our spirits and our souls.

We all know this. Who of us with an honest heart and his pride in check can say with a straight face, "I don't feel uplifted when I see something beautiful, or my fellow man well kept"? Who of us has not felt that beckoning smile when we and our loved ones dress our best? Who out there has not looked upon the mountains, the forests, and the teeming valleys, and not been struck with awe and peace? No one.

That's why our Lord discusses such things at length, though few may listen. That's why he lingers on how a priest should dress. And that priest sets an example for others. And as so goes a priest, so goes a pastor. Whichever vernacular you choose to apply from this era or that; bishop, overseer, leader. I would contend we are not referring to much different things. In English, a pastor is a shepherd. And a shepherd is one who leads others.

Now, there are men who will say it matters not how one dresses on some occasions, and take that to mean it matters not on all occasions. Such men prove themselves wrong by the folly of their own words. They have fallen prey to the deceptions of their hearts. Oh yes indeed.

Such men would say it makes no difference if they show up to a social gathering, filled with strangers they've never met, dressed as though they were ready for a night in by themselves. They would look you dead in the eye and tell you that a blooming flower isn't any more beautiful or lovely than a rotten potato. That it's all just a matter of perspective.

There are even some who say the Biblical guidance for how to dress is only for the priest, ignoring who the priest is meant to be an example for. That is, for everyone else in the congregation. A role model. And thus, everyone ought to at least make an effort to follow his example if it is good. And if his example is not good, then it should be argued he's not really a priest, but a charlatan.

These things cannot be rightly ignored by a man of reason and sound mind, for how we dress cannot be disconnected from how we style everything around us, and how those things affect our lives. Our architecture. Our homes. Our streets. Our workplaces. The way things are in the places we live and work affect how we live and work, whether we recognize it or not.

I know I have felt the unction of a tranquil, uplifting place to drive one into most fervent and fruitful productivity. And I too have known the weary toll one pays when he toils himself deep in the clutches of gloom.

Even the secular crowd knows this, disconnected as they can be from the truth. For such truths are self-evident and speak for themselves. Anyone who is honest and has at least the thinnest shred of integrity will see that when going about his work.

When environmental psychologists study how one's surroundings affect health outcomes, do they find where one lives and what one sees has no bearing and how that person is to be? Of course not.

Such men have found that even looking at pictures of tranquil scenes soothes the mind and rejuvenates the soul, reducing stress and improving one's health. How much more so to witness beauty firsthand does it bend the soul toward goodwill.

This should come as no surprise, of course. Who would've thought that seeing beautiful sights would lighten one's mood and foster a sense of positivity that leads to better results in life? Who could've imagined that being surrounded by stagnant, monotonous lands might weigh down the heart and the body with it?

This seems obvious to me. Or at least it should.

Yet let us not stoop down into treehugging disarray ourselves. For beauty is not something held in monopoly by the so-called "natural world," untouched and unshaped by man. Oh no. For man is made in God's image, and when rightly turned, shares in the good Lord's ability to create that which is lovely and endearing.

When British scientists studied beauty in both natural and manmade scenes, they found it abundant and lacking in both domains, not confined to one or the other. In their efforts to quantify the tranquility of a scene as received in the human mind, they found it lacking in natural spaces that were either too open or too closed, failing to find a balance between the two. They also observed men and women found great beauty and pleasantness in certain artificial structures containing adequate color and geometric variety, avoiding the dreariness of uninspired surfaces and drab hues of a samey lifelessness.

Nay, I tell you, nay! Beauty is not just in the eye of the beholder, as the godless materialist might have one believe at Satan's behest. For when one believes such a lie, he can be turned astray to think that humans can never make something wonderful and nature can never produce something terrible.

And when he believes that lie, what other dark paths might he be led down? What other twisted perversions might he believe, and what then might he seek to destroy? The truth is, there are many ways such a man who has been so turned can be set against his own kin and against the God of all things.

If a man is put inside an empty box, and told not to come out until he has produced a sonnet, would it be the same as or differ from that of a man set by himself to the same task aside the river's edge with the birds singing overhead? The first man might get it done, on the first day. But what of the next, when a second sonnet is due? And so on and so forth. How long before the first man cannot go on while the second finds barely enough time to contain all the words he can muster?

Not long, I would say. Not long at all.

Few people understand this better than the avowed enemies of our Lord. The Soviets with their brutalist architecture. The Chicoms under Mao with their androgynous dress codes, banning ladies from wearing pretty dresses. What was the purpose of such things? Was it merely economic frugality? Perhaps in the minds of the witless agents of satan. But there was a deeper purpose that may not have even been known by the devil's pawns. For such drudgery weighs down the soul and saps from the world the light of life.

How we dress is not just about how we style ourselves, but also the world around us. And no man of reason would deny the uplifting charm of a well-dressed environment, nor the power of the bland to tear down the mind.

Every day we walk a street filled with broken dreams and shattered hopes; buildings condemned or in disrepair; paths all cracked in deep despair. Each day like this, does sorrow creep into the seams of every keep.

Yet blessed is he who walks each day on streets so bright with beauty's way. The heart does sing and jump with joy in places free from dreary ploy.

Despite these truths, obvious and glaring, I have heard some dismiss the power of mental fatigue when boasting of how the work they do each day is really tiring. As someone who has both common sense and has engaged in both physically and mentally draining work, I can assure you of the ability of the mundane to wear a man down just as much as the rigorous.

Why is it that a man can spend long hours focused on something of interest, yet begins to falter under mere minutes of tedium? Why does it take all our strength to do that which we loathe, though it be effortless? Yet without a second thought one might expend all of himself in pursuit of that he loves?

Because not all stress is physical. There are things that can drain us mentally and emotionally, without ever forcing us to lift a finger.

Weary is the man who stares at his screen all day, never knowing the warmth of the sun or the kiss of the wind. He may not exert himself with his arms, legs, and chest. He may not push his stamina to shortness of breath. Yet he is weighed down to a depth so low, at the end of it, he finds naught the energy to even look his wife and children in the eye with a smile.

Why is it that the devoted athlete who pushes himself near to death each time he sets his body to work never seems to want for exuberance and motivation? I think the answer is quite simple, though many may not want to admit it.

Our spirits have strength that can be sapped apart from that of our flesh. The heart and mind can be worn down in a way not unlike the body. In fact, what wears upon the body may even invigorate the heart and mind.

This can happen in more ways than one, and one such way is no doubt what we discuss here today.

Let me ask you a question. Have you ever been totally engrossed in a good story and wondered where the time went, while in other moments found yourself dying for a change of scenery and stunned at how little time had yet passed?

If so, my friend, you are beginning to understand. The world around us, when not properly managed, has the power to wear us out in more ways than you may know.

Nobody knows this better than our Lord, the Man who created it all. And He tried to warn us; to teach us what we need to know. I'd wager the problem is so many are too quick to dismiss the simple lessons He gave, even among those who would profess to be His followers.

After all, it is a popular trend among professing Christians, and has been for some time I'd say, to falsely equate modesty with ugliness, and beauty with vanity. This is one of Satan's oldest tricks which he has used to lead many of God's children away and into his darkened flock.

I have heard many a professing Christian preach in vain about the merits of modesty when he himself is far from it. He may not be showing his private parts, but neither is he clothing his image of God with any dignity when he trods out in public to speak in front of others and represent our Lord looking like he's ready for a day on the couch eating pizza and binge-watching the latest drama.

When the devil goes after the secular crowd, he often tempts them to pervert beauty by way of vulgarity and overt sensuality. He tells them to bare for all to see what only one's closest companion should know.

However, when Satan needs to lead Christians away from true beauty, he cannot be so callous. Instead, he must use a more subtle deception, trading ludeness for prudishness. And covering for drudgery by falsely equating it with modesty. In this way, he can turn a sheep of God into a goat without the poor soul ever realizing where he is going.

That is not sneer at the man in his hour of need who has not but rags to cover himself with. Such a man needs no rebuke. What he needs is for someone to lend him a hand in the form of some new clothes.

No. A man who would dress with self-respect but can't because he doesn't yet have the resources is not the same as the man who can dress himself however he likes and chooses comfort over elegance.

There's nothing wrong with being comfortable. In fact, if you find true discomfort in your attire, it's no doubt because it either wasn't made to fit you or it's not been properly fastened.

Genuine discomfort is not the same as prioritizing comfort to the expense of all else. We speak of the man who tells himself it matters not how he dresses, when in fact it matters a great deal. As our Christian brothers, the Evangelicals would say, this man has made an idol of comfort. While I wouldn't quite say that, as I think it cheapens the essence of an idol, I would admit such a man has got his priorities a bit out of place.

Another word of caution needed here. Let us not look down upon any sense of fashion, for each does have its time and place. We worry ourselves here not over any article of clothing or manner of dress. Oh no. What we speak to is the man confused, thinking it matters not how he dresses at all in any time or place, when in fact it does matter very much. Worried not are we about whether a man wears one thing or another when both are considered with care to the occasion.

But what of the critic who would look reason in the face, and all the testimony of nature, and yet insist in his folly that we should not concern ourselves with how we dress for there are greater matters to preach? He would decry the exhortation to dress well, while lamenting that we speak not of how to act well in every other matter, besides this one.

To such a man, we would concede that yes, there are indeed greater matters. However, it may be of little profit to preach on such great things to those who cannot even handle such small trifles as how one dresses.

The man who cannot take a baby step will surely trip over any big leap. If you cannot even recite your ABC's, how should I expect you to speak in full sentences? I cannot. I must first help in the smaller matters before I introduce you to the burden of greater things.

We would also remind such a man, as he has clearly forgotten or never been told, that how one thinks, speaks, and behaves in every great matter is the product of the habits he has built in the smaller matters. For once again, great things are built upon the small, and we learn to ride the bike with its training wheels attached before we hit the pavement with those balancing aids off. For that is when matters get truly difficult, and you had better have mastered the so-called meaningless trifles.

The truth is, when we thrust matters of greater moral concern on those who still struggle with the small and mundane, we have already set them up for failure. Not success. And what doom then shall assuredly befall them?

All manner, I would say. All manner indeed.

What else is to be said of the issue at hand? I have even known it popular to say such guidance relating to beauty and how we dress is only for the Old Testament, not the New. As if Heaven and Earth had already passed away without us knowing, or if there was some countervailing guidance in the New Testament to amend that from the Old. As if God's ways do change, thus making Him no god at all.

They may even say that spiritual beauty is all that matters and that physical beauty is vain, as if physical form does not bend toward an outward manifestation of the inward spirit. I find that when such talk is used, those who say "spiritually" really mean "metaphorically." Because they don't even understand the words they're using, nor the English they speak.

But honest is the man who knows the truth and lives accordingly. That is a man who is on the right path. And when we all start doing that, then that, my friends, is when things get interesting.

The honest man knows his spirit is the truest part of him and the condition of his spirit shall shine through in the condition of his mind, body, and heart. If he has an ugly spirit, it will not be long before he has an ugliness for all to see throughout the rest of his being. What the prude understands is that you cannot make the spirit beautiful by dressing up the body, but he fails to understand that you can make the spirit ugly by dressing down the body. It's only a matter of time, and that subtle change is what makes it so deceptive.

These are things the man of truth must be mindful of.

I know I needn't worry much about my fellow brothers and sisters being lewd. The Christian walk does readily enough lead away from that. However, where I have known so many of our American brethren to stumble is falling into a disheveled habit.

We may contend to have come from times past when genuine Christians took a yoke upon themselves to dress up so high they pulled the ladder up from others. Yet I more oft see in these dark days a brother of mine who dresses down so far, he never sets up the ladder to begin with.

And what's the difference? If the ladder is unreachable, or if it's never set up at all? There is none, for both paths lead others to stumble.

My brothers and sisters, let us walk neither such path, but one that is straight and true. Unfailing in our target, however unsteady we may feel in our steps.

For when we follow that right way, oh what a blessing it is. To us and our hearts, and to those around us, who return the same before long. For a light is meant to shine, and in so doing, leads others to shore. And then, their lights begin to shine too. And the world becomes a brighter place, with no shadow so dark to pierce through all that glare.

There is a war on beauty, with Satan at its head. Which side will you choose? There is no middle ground. We all fight for one or the other with the lives we live each and every day, knowingly or not.

So choose to live beautifully, and truly so, not metaphorically. For the Lord sees such effort and diligently rewards those who seek His path. Begin alone if you must, for He will not let you trod alone for long.

As for me and my house, one might say we shall serve the Lord. Thus, shall we endeavor to live beautifully, as best as we are able. I hope you will do the same. God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America. Amen.

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