

SERMON DELIVERED AT THE SUNDAY COMMUNION SERVICE

by

The Rev. Robert J. Lietz • Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church • Oak Park, Illinois

Text: Proverbs 31:30

*“Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain;
but a woman that feareth the Lord,
she shall be praised.”*

In the name of our Triune God, the Source of all absolutely true knowledge, true wisdom, and true understanding as revealed in His Holy Word, dear friends and brethren in Christ:

When we faithfully confess and bear witness to the Holy Scriptures, by God’s grace and with His almighty help, we may sometimes receive the response: “That’s just **your** interpretation.” And how do we reply to such a statement? Our reply ought to be clear and to-the-point: “It is not up to **me** to interpret the Scriptures according to **my own** personal, private interpretation (II Peter 1:21). The Scriptures interpret **themselves**.” It is never our place to put our own “spin” or our own “slant” on what is written down in the Word of God, whether in the Old Testament or in the New, whether in Genesis, in Revelation, or anywhere in between.

False doctrine and practice are the result of not letting the Scriptures interpret **themselves**. The Scriptural teaching of the *real presence* in the Lord’s Supper is rejected by many because they do not let the Word of God interpret **itself** when it comes to the one little word “*is*” (Matthew 26:26, 28; Mark 14:22, 24; Luke 22:19-20; I Corinthians 11:24-25). So, all false doctrines and practices continue to exist because their teachers, supporters, and defenders do not let the Scriptures interpret **themselves**.

This morning’s sermon text from Proverbs 31:30 is **clear** in its message and **interprets itself**

when it gives to us

GOD'S PERFECT WISDOM CONCERNING A GODLY, CHRISTIAN SPOUSE!

I. His perfect wisdom warns of beauty which is only outward;

II. His perfect wisdom points to the evidence of inward beauty,
which is the most important beauty.

I.

The book of Proverbs is often identified as the “Book of Wisdom;” it is perfect wisdom and instruction from God to us. In the first chapter, the Holy Ghost informs us that “*a wise man will hear and will increase learning, and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels, ...but fools despise wisdom and instruction*” (vv. 5, 7b). The final chapter of Proverbs, chapter 31, provides us with on-going, continuous wisdom and instruction from God to us; and we would be plain fools if we despised the wisdom and instruction that He affords us!

Some of that perfect wisdom from God to us occurs in the words of our sermon text from Proverbs 31! Our God, in His perfect wisdom, gives us this instruction and this warning: “*Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain.*” Pleasantness, graciousness, kindness, and beauty — when these are **only** *outward*, when these are **only** *skin-deep*, when these are **only** “*sheep’s clothing*” (Matthew 7:15), when these are only like “*whited sepulchres,*” like beautiful, white-washed burial vaults which are only beautiful on the *outside* (Matthew 23:27), then such **veneer**, only skin-deep pleasantness, graciousness, kindness, and beauty, is “*deceitful,*” is a false witness, is a lie, and is as worthless (I Corinthians 8:4) as an idol (as a false, non-existent god) — Zechariah 10:2. So, our God’s perfect wisdom, His perfect instruction, and His perfect warning are expressed in these few, simple words, which interpret themselves: “*Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain.*”

Let us not forget, but ever remember that the only reason revealed in Scripture for the world-wide flood at the time of Noah was “*that the sons of God [the professing Christian men] saw the daughters of men [the unbelieving women of the heathen] that they were **fair**, and they took them wives of all which they chose*” (Genesis 6:2). Those men who professed to be children of God, those men who professed to be believers in the promised Messiah, saw the outward beauty, the outward attractiveness, the outward good looks, and the outward gorgeousness of the heathen women, the unbelieving women; and, on the basis of this outward prettiness alone, they married them because this was what **they** wanted, this was what **they** decided on, this was the choice which **they** made, not because this was what **God** wanted for them, not because this was **God’s** choice for them.

Right after this report of the conduct of those professing Christian men who married heathen, unbelieving women just because they were outwardly beautiful, attractive, and good-looking, the Holy Ghost had Moses write down the sad and shocking *results* of this conduct: “*And the Lord said, ‘My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.’ There were giants in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old men of renown. And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart. And the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast and the creeping thing and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth Me that I have made them.’ ...And God looked upon the earth and, behold, it was corrupt, for **all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.** And God said unto Noah, ‘The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth’” (Genesis 6:3-7, 12-13). The children, the offspring, the descendants of these marriages between the Christian men and the unbelieving women are described as “*giants, ...mighty, ...renowned*” because of their great, huge, gigantic wickedness, and their total, well-known, renowned devotion to sin*

and evil — leaving their Creator, the one, true God, their Messiah and Savior “out-of-the-picture,” “out-in-the-cold,” someone whom they did not need, someone whom they could get along without.

God’s perfect wisdom concerning a Godly spouse includes His warning of beauty which is only *outward*. This outward beauty alone is what the wicked flesh, the devil, and the ungodly world want all people, including all Christians, to be **most** concerned about in a spouse. Should we **take seriously** this warning from our God in our sermon text concerning beauty which is only outward? Yes, **most certainly!** —Is this warning, “*Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain,*” for **single Christian men** as they are waiting on their gracious God for the help and guidance of His Word in seeking a Godly spouse? Indeed, **it is!** Young single men, do not set any *outward* standards for your future spouse, standards such as the size of her breasts, her waistline, her face, her complexion, her hair, and other outward features! —Is this divine warning concerning outward beauty alone **also** for **married Christian men** as they look at and continue to view their own spouses? Married men, do not set any *outward* standards for your spouse, such as her weight, her waistline, her hair, and so forth! —Does this warning in our text, “*Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain,*” apply also to **single Christian women** as they wait on their gracious God for the help and guidance from His Word in seeking a Godly spouse? **Most certainly!** Young, single women, do not set *outward* standards for your future spouse, standards such as his weight, his complexion, his build, his voice, his hair, and so on. —And does the divine warning in our text apply also to **married Christian women** as they look at and continue to view their spouses? **Of course! Absolutely!** Married women, do not set outward standards for your spouse, standards such as his weight, his waistline, his hair, and so forth. So, should we all turn into “slobs”? Of course not! Our bodies are not ours, but God’s; therefore we are to be good managers of what He has given to each of us. But, *outward* beauty is not the most important beauty.

So, God’s perfect wisdom concerning a Godly spouse does indeed warn of beauty which is **only outward**; but God’s perfect wisdom also points to **the evidence of inward beauty**, which is the most important beauty.

II.

“A woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised [she is worthy to be praised, to be commended].” This woman, this wife, this mother honored, respected, revered, and stood in awe of the Lord Jehovah, the God who, in and through His only-begotten Son (John 3:16), reconciled the whole world of sinners unto Himself (II Corinthians 5:19). Christ, God’s Anointed One, “*the Lord, [her] Righteousness*” (Jeremiah 23:6), the Just, the sinless One (I Peter 3:18; Hebrews 4:15), fulfilled the Law of God perfectly (Matthew 5:17) for her and for all (Romans 5:19), and then also died for her and for all (II Corinthians 5:15) to satisfy God’s justice in eternity already and thus to reconcile all sinners unto God (Romans 5:10). This awe for the only One who gives hope and comfort to sinners was evidence of the work of the Gospel of grace in her heart and life, that Gospel which had brought her to saving faith in the Messiah, the only Savior of sinners. Her Gospel-produced faith in the Savior gave her not only inward spiritual beauty, but also gave her true outward beauty through the fruits of that attachment to the only Savior for sinners. The Holy Ghost moved James, in the second chapter of his Epistle, to declare: “*I will show thee my faith by my works*” (v. 18), works such as hearing, believing, and following the Word of God (Luke 11:28; John 10:27; 18:37). “*Faith without works is dead*” (James 2:20).

Who deserves the praise and glory for producing this true, genuine, lasting, and wonderful inward and outward beauty, the most important beauty, received by faith in the vicarious satisfaction of Christ Jesus, that substitutionary, satisfactory-to-God obedience, suffering, and death for the whole world of sinners (I John 2:2)? This question is answered so quickly when we listen to the words of our Savior to all of His believers: “*I am the Vine; ye are the branches; he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without Me ye can do nothing*” (John 15:5).

Yet, in our text we are told: “A woman that feareth the Lord, *she shall be praised.*” This God-fearing woman did not praise herself. Rather, we are told that “*her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her*” (Proverbs 31:28). Her believing children are grateful to God for all that He has done for them through their believing, God-respectig mother; and her believing, God-respecting husband is also grateful to God for all that He has done for him through his Godly spouse. Children, how often have you thanked your gracious God for His gift to you of a believing, God-respecting mother? Husbands, how often have you praised your merciful God for having given to you the gift of a believing, God-respecting wife, who is the inwardly-beautiful mother of your children? The Holy Ghost moved the Apostle Paul to write down these words concerning the Christians at Philippi: “*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you*” (1:3).

This woman in our text, who was married, gave further evidence of her faith in the Messiah. In addition to demonstrating grateful respect for the God of her salvation, she also worked hard in doing what was good and not evil for her husband, for her household, and for her children (Proverbs 31:11-22, 24-25, 27) to show her thankfulness for the goodness which her God had shown toward her. After all, He did not hold her evil deeds against her, but held them against her Savior, who “*was wounded for [her] transgressions, [and] was bruised for [her] iniquities, ...and with [whose] stripes [she was] healed* (Isaiah 53:5), healed from the terrible, terminal disease of sin, and saved from the deserved torment of hell (John 3:16-18, 36). Also, she showed her invisible faith in the promises of the Savior when “*she open[ed] her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue [was] the law of kindness*” (v. 26). Jesus Himself taught that “*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*” (Matthew 12:34b). These are some of the evidences and fruits of the inward beauty, the most important beauty, which are to be looked for in a Godly spouse. Is only the Christian, God-fearing **mother** and **wife** to be praised? Oh, no! Scripture teaches us in Psalm 128: “*Blessed is everyone that feareth the Lord, that walketh in His ways*” (v. 1).

Why ought we truly and genuinely to be concerned about a Godly spouse for ourselves, for our children, for our friends, for our brethren? Our motivation ought to be built on God’s everlasting concern in and through Christ Jesus for us and for our salvation, and His carrying through in eternity with that concern for us by removing from our account all of our failures and faults and charging them to Someone else’s account, namely the account of Christ Jesus, so that all of these faults and failures and have most certainly been paid for in full and completely removed by Him. Yes, indeed “*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. ...For He hath made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*” (II Corinthians 5:19, 21). May this love of Christ, which we enjoy by faith in Him, constrain us to live, not for ourselves, not for our sinful flesh, but for Him who lived and died for us and rose again (II Corinthians 5:15) by letting the perfect wisdom of His Word be our light and lamp (Psalm 119:105) in choosing a Godly spouse, in heeding His warnings concerning mere outward beauty in a spouse, in thanking Him for providing us with a Godly spouse when that is the case, and in encouraging and reminding others of the perfect wisdom of the Scriptures concerning a Godly spouse, ever remembering the words of St. Paul, yes, the words of God Himself, in I Corinthians, addressed to all believers in Jesus: “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God*” (10:31-32); “*for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s* (6: 20). Amen.

Soli Deo gloria!