

Adorning the Gospel

By Dennis Pollock

The apostle Paul writes: "Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, **that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior** in all things" (Titus 2:9,10). To adorn means: to make something look good, to beautify or decorate. In this verse Paul is telling the slaves that by serving their masters faithfully and honestly they will make the gospel of Christ attractive. The lives we live can make the gospel of Jesus Christ becoming unto men and women. In this teaching we are going to look at attractiveness – a concept that may not seem very spiritual but is in truth a vital aspect of the evangelistic mission our Lord Jesus has entrusted to us.

Attractiveness is an idea found in every culture and society. As God gave the Israelites instructions about what to do with their captives as they engaged in war in Canaan, He said: "When you go out to war against your enemies, and the LORD your God delivers them into your hand, and you take them captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her and would take her for your wife, then you shall bring her home to your house" (Deut 21:10-12). God recognized that generally men will prefer beauty to homeliness. As the Jews looked over their female captives, searching for a possible wife, the beautiful ladies would normally get far more consideration than the plain ones.

In this respect things haven't changed very much today, thousands of years later. Studies consistently show that attractive people have advantages over unattractive ones in nearly every area of life. They get jobs easier, get dates easier, and are normally more popular than their unattractive counterparts. One study has shown that men who spend time in the presence of a pretty lady beforehand will do significantly worse on tests designed to measure brain function – they, in a sense, lose their minds over a pretty face! Beauty, or the lack of it, is a huge factor that plays a role in all our lives. Hollywood has long known this and made use of it. When you watch movies based on real life events they often show pictures of the real people at the end of the movie. Invariably the actors are far prettier or more handsome than the individuals they pretend to be. The real people usually look like ordinary, everyday folks – people you see at the grocery store or in line at the bank. But the actors, with their fine features and beautiful teeth don't look at all common. Somehow Hollywood has decided the American public wouldn't be all that interested in spending a couple of hours watching people with plain, ordinary, not-so-beautiful faces.

Of course there are many other kinds of beauty beyond physical appearance. In Genesis Moses prophesies: "Naphtali is a deer let loose; he uses **beautiful words**." C. S. Lewis, that great Christian writer did not gain world recognition due to his looks – but there was a beauty in his written words that has never lost its attraction for readers, even to the present day. Personalities can be attractive. Not all popular people are stunningly beautiful. Some attract friends through their sense of humor, their ability to express themselves in a winsome manner, or their manner of interacting socially. Even one's voice can be attractive or repellant. When he was a young man, a Bible college president told Billy Graham he had an attractive voice, saying: "You have a voice that pulls. God can use that voice of yours. He can use it mightily." He was surely right about that!

Some have read that man looks on the outward appearance but God on the heart, and have decided that attractiveness is unimportant. They are in error. The truth is that God has always used attractiveness in the lives of His people to accomplish His purposes, but it is not always (in fact rarely) physical attractiveness. When David fled from Saul and began to live out in the wilderness areas, the Bible tells us: "And

everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him" (1 Samuel 22:2). It would not be an easy thing to go out into the wilderness and expect to gather hundreds of men to yourself. Indeed for most of us, it would be an impossibility. But in David's case it happened very naturally. David wasn't perhaps as physically imposing as his larger and older brothers, but he had an attractiveness to him that they couldn't possibly match. Men were always drawn to him, a not so minor gift for one who was destined to become the leader of the people of God.

Why should Christians worry about being attractive? As we saw in the opening verse, it is for the sake of the gospel: that we may adorn the gospel of Jesus Christ. For God's redemptive plan in Christ to be effective in the earth, people must be drawn to Jesus, and this means that they must be drawn to those who belong to Jesus. God will rarely draw men to Himself apart from using people. He has chosen to draw sinners to Christ by drawing them towards His people.

As we read of Jesus we find that He was highly magnetic. In Mark's gospel we read: "Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; **and they came to Him from every direction**" (Mark 1:45). We use the term "charisma" today to define someone that people are drawn to, and Jesus surely had it. There were times when He would deliberately go off into the mountains or the wilderness just to escape the clamoring crowds that constantly surrounded Him. This magnetism seemed to be passed onto His church after His death and resurrection. We find that when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost thousands of people came together, drawn by the Spirit's presence. Because of this spontaneous gathering of people, Peter had an audience to preach to, and the result was that 3,000 people were saved and added to the church. Had there been no coming together of the people, the disciples would still have had a wonderful experience in the Holy Spirit, but the church would have remained exactly the same number as it was when the day began – 120. Charles Spurgeon once made the remark that when a hunter shoots his gun at a large flock of birds flying overhead, he has a pretty fair chance of shooting one, but if he is aiming at only one or two overhead, chances are he will miss. The more people that gather to hear our message, the more likely it becomes that some will be touched and brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

It is very much right that we should seek this divine attractiveness. Jesus tells us: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). While we are strictly warned not to do works to look good in front of men, yet the shining of our light should result in men glorifying God and being drawn to Him. On job interviews or first dates with that special person, we determine to look our best and make the best possible impression; we want them to find us attractive. As we serve Jesus and attempt to minister Him to others, we likewise want to be as attractive as we possibly can. This does not mean an excessive emphasis upon the most expensive clothes or spending thousands on plastic surgery, but it does mean doing what we can to project a winsome, engaging manner. If sinners are repelled by our manners and our style, it is unlikely that they will be attracted to our Savior.

Things that Attract

So what are those things that adorn the gospel of Jesus Christ! One of them is **excellence**. The Bible says, "Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before unknown men" (Proverbs 22:29). In Colossians we read: "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23). Sloppy, careless, poorly done work is repulsive. The prophet Daniel was a man who gained favor with God and with pagan, Gentile kings. He served several different government administrations during his long and productive life. How could this devout man be so accepted with ungodly kings that had little use for Daniel's faith? The Bible says, "Daniel distinguished himself above

the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him" (Daniel 6:3). We strive for excellence not for its own sake, nor for our sake, but for the sake of our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is honored when our labors are marked by excellence.

Another virtue that attracts is **humility**. The Bible tells us that God resists the proud, but in truth we humans also tend to resist the proud – except when the pride is our own. There is something attractive about a man or a woman who speaks the truth in humility. We quickly grow tired of the bombastic, loud, bossy, types who think only of themselves. Arrogant, opinionated, domineering people, full of themselves and their own ways and opinions, are decidedly unattractive. Most folks try to avoid them when possible. Peter writes: "...all of you be submissive to one another, **and be clothed with humility...**" (1 Peter 5:5). When we put on the cloak of humility, men and women will be drawn to us and to our Savior.

The greatest and most attractive of all virtues is love. Most of us have had people in our lives that were extremely meaningful to us, not because they were physically beautiful or handsome, but because they showed a deep love for and interest in us. Love is the universal language. People may not fully understand your idioms, they may be from a totally different culture, they may not be able to identify with your background, but if they sense your love they will be drawn to you. And when you die and your family and friends gather together to mark your passing, they will probably not speak of or care about how pretty you were, how attractive your eyes, or what a magnificent head of hair you had. If your funeral will truly be a celebration, it will be because of the love and compassion you have shown to others on your journey through this world of pain and suffering. Love is to mark the disciples of Jesus, who tells us: "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

The virtues we have been describing are not natural to the human race. We are born steeped in sin and selfishness, and there is precious little room for them in a life apart from God. These virtues that attract are what the Bible refers to as "the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:11). They come through an abiding relationship with Jesus and that experience of being continually filled with the Holy Spirit.

As usual the world gets it exactly wrong. The world's attempts at attractiveness almost always focus upon physical appearance, but in truth this is the weakest and the most temporary of all attractiveness. People often spend tens of thousands of dollars on plastic surgery to fill in wrinkles, enlarge breasts, lift faces, fill out lips, and yet in many cases they give no attention at all to the beauty of the inner man. By all means make every effort to present a nice appearance, but don't overdo it or suppose that if you can just look pretty enough the world will become a better place. We are told to worship the Lord in **the beauty of holiness**. There is none so beautiful as our God. Wherever His presence and His kindness richly fill His children, men and women will be drawn unto Him. And if you are one of those who feels he has very little personal charisma, do not fear. Jesus Christ, the magnetic One, has all the charisma you will ever need. As you abide in Him and allow His gifts to operate in your life, you will find certain specific areas where His attractiveness will be manifest in you. No, you will not find this magnetism in every area – after all we are but individual members of His body. But in certain specific gifts that attractiveness will shine brightly, and people will be drawn unto Him.