



Beauty Not
BEHELD

Paige Stitt McBride

Foreword by Carl R. Trueman

Beauty Not Beheld: A Daily Guard Against the Lies of Self-Love Culture

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To my sisters, Emily and Grace, and to my dear friend Caelan.

May we all learn to see the world through the eyes of God.



Table of
CONTENTS

FOREWORD <i>by Carl Trueman</i>	05
A WORD <i>On Beauty</i>	08
WEEK ONE <i>The Perceived Self</i>	22
WEEK TWO <i>The Broken Self</i>	86
WEEK THREE <i>The Redeemed Self</i>	142
WEEK FOUR <i>The Physical Self</i>	200
WEEK FIVE <i>The Future Self</i>	260
WEEK SIX <i>Not Yourself</i>	318

FOREWORD

Dr. Carl Trueman, PhD



The perennial challenge for the church since at least the time Paul penned 1 Corinthians has been to press the gospel on each generation in a manner which exposes the myths human beings tell each other about themselves and the world in which they live—and to do so in a way that shows how the gospel of Jesus Christ presents us with a better way of living before each other and before God. While that gospel remains the same and will always be foolishness or an offense to whoever happens to be the contemporary equivalent of Paul’s Greeks and Jewish critics, the precise ways in which it is dismissed as such are always particular to the cultural ethos of the times.

In an age such as ours, where so-called generation gaps are becoming shorter and shorter in chronological span thanks to the accelerating rate of technological change and its impact upon how we live, that task can seem daunting, especially for those responsible for teaching the younger generation to know, love, and fear the Lord. That is why it is so important to have good material that helps us think through the

questions of our day in a manner that is biblical but that also engages directly with the ethos of our day. Paige McBride's devotional is just such a book.

In these pages, Paige takes apart the myth of the modern expressive self, along with the many false beliefs that it fosters: lies about beauty, subjectivism, the authority of emotions, and, underlying them all, the lie that rejects even the possibility of transcendent, absolute truth. Yet she does so in a way that leads the reader gently by the hand, day-by-day, not only to see the futility of the world's conceptions of these matters, but the true beauty of the Bible's answers.

I had the privilege—and delight—of teaching Paige when she was a student. Now our roles have been reversed, and I have had the joy of learning from her via this book; her first, but I earnestly hope not her last. I pray that this volume will have the impact upon the reader that it merits.

Carl R. Trueman
Grove City College
February 2022



“**W**omen hate their bodies more than ever before,” reported skincare company Dove in their 2016 global survey on self-image.¹ The study questioned more than 10,500 women in 13 different countries between the ages of 10 and 60 and concluded that low body-confidence has become—quite literally—a pandemic. Interviewees were convinced that the unrealistic standards in the media are responsible for the issue. They felt that women were under pressure to conform to oppressive and unattainable beauty ideals. Dove was determined to use their platform to fight against these self-demeaning beauty standards and usher in a new age of self-love and body-confidence.

Dove is not the only voice in this movement, nor has the trend shifted since 2016. In fact, in 2021, this topic continues to be the major focus of most female influencers. Powerful women around the globe are banding together to protest these unrealistic standards and are

1 The Dove Global Beauty and Confidence Report, 2016.

calling women to embrace their own definition of beauty. To quote a few among the many:

“Self-esteem comes from being able to define the world in your own terms and refusing to abide by the judgment of others.”²

-*Oprah Winfrey*

“I love the philosophy of just accepting who you are and just being happy...You define your worth! Don’t ever give anyone else that much power over yourself...Less judgment—more dynamic, unbiased self love.”³

-*Khloé Kardashian*

“I have my own definition of what I think is beautiful and sexy.”⁴

-*Selena Gomez*

“Your self-worth is determined by you. You don’t have to depend on someone telling you who you are.”⁵

-*Beyoncé*

2 Oprah Winfrey, “What I Know For Sure.” *Oprah.com*, July 19, 2008. <https://www.oprah.com/omagazine/what-i-know-for-sure-oprah-winfrey/all>, accessed January 5, 2022.

3 Khloe Kardashian, cited by Samantha Schnurr. “Khloe Kardashian Reveals How She Found Self-Love and Acceptance.” *E!*, March 14, 2016. <https://www.eonline.com/news/748300/khloe-kardashian-reveals-how-she-found-self-love-and-acceptance>, accessed January 5, 2022.

4 Selena Gomez, cited by Rachel Heinrichs. “November Cover Star Selena Gomez: ‘I Feel in Control.’” *Flare, FashionMagazine.com*, October 1, 2015. <https://fashionmagazine.com/flare/november-cover-star-selena-gomez-i-feel-in-control/>, accessed January 5, 2022.

5 Beyoncé, cited by Peter Economy. “17 of the Most Inspirational Quotes From Beyoncé—Business Genius and Music Superstar.” *Inc.com*, June 4, 2019. <https://www.inc.com/peter->

The common thread is clear: Largely, culture's response to the conundrum of poor self-image is exhorting women to forget other people's opinions and standards and create their own. In other words, culture wants to remind women, "*Beauty is in the eye of the beholder!* So don't let some beholders get you down, you are the true and only important beholder!" This sentiment sounds empowering at first glance, but the results don't corroborate. Since this study in 2016, the number of voices chanting women's empowerment have grown, and yet so has the number of women who hate the way they look and even hate themselves. Maybe it's time women turn to the Scriptures for their answers instead of their favorite celebrities.

If we really want to debunk all this, we need to get a bit philosophical. Are you ready? I promise I'll be quick. The popular view of beauty today is what philosophers call *aesthetic relativism*. In other words, **beauty is determined by the one perceiving it; it is subjective**. Beauty is believed to be located within the person looking, not within the so-called "beautiful" object. For example, when you gaze at the sunset, beauty is the experience you have as you gaze; it is not an attribute of the sky itself. Beauty is experienced by the *subject* (the person); it is not something in the *object* (the sky). Beauty is not inherent in the sky, it is within your enjoyment of that sky. Therefore, beauty is relative to the person perceiving it; it is subjective beauty, not objective beauty.

[economy/17-of-most-inspirational-quotes-from-beyonce-business-genius-music-superstar.html](https://www.economy/17-of-most-inspirational-quotes-from-beyonce-business-genius-music-superstar.html), accessed January 5, 2022.

If beauty is purely subjective, then there is no arguing over what is beautiful and what is not because beauty is only related to personal preference. You cannot argue over preference. By saying beauty is purely subjective—merely a matter of preference—we make it impossible to critically evaluate beauty. If someone says you are ugly, you cannot argue it. You just have to accept that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and this beholder sees none of it in you. But if beauty is objective, then there is open discussion of whether something is beautiful or not. In fact, when someone says that you are not beautiful, you do not have to surrender and say, “Well, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so I guess they’re right.” No! An objective beauty allows you to actually argue that you are beautiful even if that person doesn’t realize it. You cannot argue over preferences. You can only argue over facts. As long as we insist on subjective beauty, we will make it logically impossible to defend beauty when others do not see it. This is the standard way of thinking about beauty today.

If you Google the definition of beauty this is what you will find: “a combination of qualities, such as shape, color, or form, that *pleases the aesthetic senses*, especially the sight.”⁶ Dictionary.com defines it this way: Beauty is “the quality present in a thing or person that gives intense *pleasure or deep satisfaction* to the mind, whether arising from sensory manifestations (as shape, color, sound, etc.), a meaningful

6 Google, s.v. “beauty,” accessed January 12, 2022, <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>. Google’s English dictionary is provided by Oxford Languages.

design or pattern, or something else.”⁷ Finally, Merriam-Webster defines beauty as “the quality or aggregate of qualities in a person or thing that *gives pleasure* to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit.”⁸ What is the common thread in all of these definitions? Beauty is about pleasure. It is about pleasing ourselves. This ideology is not completely misguided; true beauty *does* bring about pleasure. That is why beauty is so powerful. The problem is that we often fail to enjoy that which will ultimately give us the *most* pleasure. Our sinful selves tend to trade in true pleasure and exchange it for a fleeting sense of satisfaction or titillation. So connecting beauty with pleasure is not incorrect, but to only recognize a subjective element in beauty fails to recognize the objective reality of beauty. In fact, we would likely experience a lot more pleasure when confronting beauty if we embraced its objective nature. Unfortunately, most today only understand beauty in subjective terms (what they feel), and therefore, diminish it to only a matter of preference.

What makes this view so appealing to women today is that an experience of beauty can be neither correct nor incorrect, neither right nor wrong. All preferences of beauty are considered equally valid; it is only in arrogance and judgment that someone can say that another should find one object more beautiful than another, let alone one body more beautiful than another! You can’t tell people how to feel

⁷ *Dictionary.com*, s.v. “beauty,” accessed January 12, 2022, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/beauty>.

⁸ *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “beauty,” accessed January 12, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/beauty>.

and what to like, they have the right to their own preferences and opinions. Society's standards and expectations are just the opinions of a few powerful people. However, they should not control you. You can define beauty on your own terms. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and *you* are the most important beholder in your life. So don't let anyone tell you how to feel when you look in the mirror! This is the type of thinking that dominates our cultural imagination today.

So what's the point of getting all philosophical? Well, this relative definition of beauty sounds great at first—it seems to promise that people cannot impose their view of beauty upon others to shame them—but the logical implications of this statement are actually quite troubling. The relative definition of beauty fails to deliver on its promises in three major ways:

Relativism makes beauty and ugliness morally unimportant.

Relativism leads to debilitating narcissism.

Relativism gives people too much power and therefore cannot foster tolerance nor diversity.

1. *Relativism makes beauty and ugliness morally unimportant.*

If beauty is merely a matter of preference, then so is ugliness. But this makes us more uncomfortable, especially in extreme cases. Most sensible people would agree that morbid images and child pornography are ugly and they would look down on others who find them enjoyable. Why? Because there is something that tells us that the image itself

is ugly—objectively ugly. It's not a matter of opinion; it's not up for debate. This phenomenon is similar to the case of moral relativism. People are fine with certain moral discrepancies and they will say "you have a right to your opinion" until you say, for example, you believe the Holocaust was morally good. They would respond in anger and proclaim that you are evil, and rightly so. Turns out, they cannot let morality be merely a matter of opinion in every case. So where does the line get drawn between moral issues that are non-negotiable and moral issues which are up for grabs? Similarly, where is the line drawn between which beauty preferences are just matters of opinion and those beauty preferences which are condemnable? Relative beauty does not allow us to evaluate beauty because it makes beauty a matter of mere preference. We cannot condemn anyone's opinion that something is beautiful, because if they find pleasure in it—even if we find it disgusting or repugnant—it is, by their definition, beautiful. You cannot make any judgment calls on a person's beauty preferences. If they like pornography, then it is beautiful and you cannot tell them otherwise. But there comes a point when we are uncomfortable with someone saying that something is beautiful that we *know* is unarguably ugly. We have a deep sense in our hearts that what the person prefers, what that person enjoys, what they find beautiful, is miserably wrong. In fact, we sense that they have committed some sort of sin in enjoying that ugly thing. They might find pleasure in it, but they ought to be shamed for doing so. Just because they enjoy pornographic images of a child, doesn't mean that the images are beautiful. Why do we think that? Because deep down we do have a sense of *objective beauty*. Objective beauty insists that some things are in and of themselves

beautiful, and some things are in and of themselves ugly. It is not up for debate (just like the moral evaluation of the Holocaust is not up for debate). If aesthetics become completely relative, completely a matter of opinion, then beauty becomes basically meaningless. Turns out, when we look a little deeper, relative beauty does not fully account for what we know about beauty and ugliness.

2. *Relativism leads to debilitating narcissism.*

The second danger of aesthetic relativism is that it locks you in a cage of self-introspection. It forces you to fixate on yourself because it puts the locus of truth within yourself. Not only is this not biblical, but it allows us to live in the delusion that what we think and feel determines reality. So if you do not like what you see when you look in the mirror, you are ugly. The only way to “be beautiful” is to *see yourself as beautiful*. Beauty itself is not really a thing, it is only the perception of a thing. The only hope for the relativist is to convince themselves that what they naturally think is ugly is actually beautiful. They have to force themselves to feel differently when they look in the mirror. This, therefore, leads to a constant focus on the self and its feelings. The task becomes quite worrisome and seemingly hopeless when we try to convince ourselves that every blemish and wrinkle is beautiful. It is an endless cycle of trying to like what we see. Beauty is only there when we feel it, right? Well, we all know that our feelings are like roller coasters. If our body-image is completely dependent on our feelings, it will be forever unstable. We will never win the battle. We will wake up day by day and relive this unstable cycle all over again.

We must be endlessly devoted to *feeling* good about ourselves, because *being* beautiful is equivalent to *feeling* beautiful when beauty is only subjective. Rather than conforming our feelings to reality, we seek to conform reality to our feelings. It's exhausting and sadly ineffective.

3. *Relativism gives people too much power, and therefore, cannot foster tolerance nor diversity.*

Finally, the last issue with relativism is that it cannot deliver on its promises of tolerance and diversity because it grants people the power to define reality. While it might seem nice to be able to define beauty for yourself, relativism does not account for our inordinate craving for acceptance and our deep seated desire to be seen as beautiful and significant. So even if we end up achieving our goal of believing we are beautiful, we are soon empty again because we do not just want to think we are pretty, we want *others* to think we are pretty. And therefore, relativism drags us helplessly into people-pleasing. This may explain why, although women are claiming to only want to be beautiful on their own terms, many girls end up trying to look strikingly similar to the people recognized as beautiful or attractive in the media and by men. We are so desperate to be seen and loved, that we end up conforming. If people determine what is beautiful, we will always end up bowing down to people. If beauty is completely a matter of being seen by other people, then we will not be convinced that we are beautiful until we are seen as such by others. But we know this is not right. A gorgeous, sublime waterfall that has never been seen by one person in all of history is still beautiful. It's beauty is not

dependent on being seen. It is beautiful whether or not people notice it. That seems obviously true to us. But a relative definition of beauty gives people all the power when it comes to what is beautiful. And therefore, if no person sees that waterfall and takes pleasure in that waterfall, it is not beautiful. But that can't be right!

For all the empty promises of tolerance and diversity, relative beauty has left us in a culture where women are obsessed with appearance, trends, pictures, and “feeling empowered,” and yet are somehow more insecure than ever before. Not only does relativism create philosophical and theological issues, *it does not help*. It may be time to consider a new avenue of action. We need to define beauty biblically. Maybe we will find that the Bible does a better job of making sense of our encounter with beauty than we can.

So this is the conundrum of defining beauty: *We need a definition of beauty that accounts for the inherent quality of beauty in an object* (therefore it is not a matter of opinion and does not depend on people seeing it) but that *also accounts for the fact that beauty is related to individual perception and pleasure in an important way*. In fewer words, it seems right that our definition of beauty has both an objective and a subjective part. It is clear that beauty has something to do with pleasure. But that cannot be the only defining factor, otherwise we will be in the predicament we just spoke of. How can the Bible help us understand beauty as both a matter of fact and a personal experience?

In Genesis 1, God “*saw*” that his creation was good. Notice here, that “good” is not a matter of preference—at least not biblically speaking.

Good and evil aren't matters of opinion. Goodness is an absolute. God perceived something inherently good within his creation; he saw an *objective* good. But it wasn't his "seeing" that made it good. It was good on its own, completely independent of his perception. His "seeing" was just an experience of that good. But we also take note that the verbiage that "*God saw*" connects the goodness of creation with a certain perceptual satisfaction and pleasure. This means that the beauty of the creation and the perception of that beauty are indeed intimately connected. It links the objective quality of beauty in a thing with our enjoyment when encountering it.

Psalm 19 says that "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1). In this text, creation functions as an instrument of revelation and communication. Created things have a God-ordained way of revealing the greatness of God. Here we find a biblical definition of beauty: ***the ability of a thing to communicate truth and/or realize goodness.*** A beautiful thing is that which communicates some sort of truth to us or reveals goodness to us in a vivid way. Creation is beautiful because it is a physical form that communicates something true and good about God. And this makes sense of why the human being is "god": the physical form of human beings is an effective communicator of the glory of God. You heard this before: we are his image. A song is rightly called beautiful, because certain sounds and melodies have a way of getting us in touch with transcendence. We cannot put it into words, but we know that the song is beautiful. This definition of beauty is objective, because the ability to reflect truth and goodness is *not* a matter of opinion. You can do it well or poorly. Things can be

objectively ugly: they communicate a distortion of God's goodness. It doesn't matter if someone receives pleasure from morbid images, they are condemned in doing so because beauty is not a matter of opinion. The images are not beautiful; they are ugly. And that person looking at them is delighting in that ugliness, which is the essence of sin. So the Bible maintains an objective definition of beauty that makes it meaningful and incredibly important.

But this definition also reminds us that beauty has an essentially communicative role, a perceptual purpose if you will. It is a way to reveal goodness and that is why it gives us so much pleasure. When we consider why people have such a wide variety in what they find beautiful, we realize that this is not because beauty is just a matter of opinion, but that it is because beauty communicates something infinite: God's goodness. Beauty is not just objective, it is transcendently objective. Therefore, from the many different places and perspectives human beings gaze, they find the glory of God revealed in manifold ways. This accomplishes what relative beauty wants to accomplish: diversity in beauty. When someone sees something truly beautiful that you do not notice, they do not just have a different opinion than you do, they are perceiving a part of the divine goodness that you have yet to enjoy. Therefore, it is an obligation for the Christian to contemplate the beautiful things recognized from different peoples, cultures, and places, for it is our duty to enjoy the manifold glory of our God.

The Christian church cannot be silent on this issue. For many believers, relative beauty has passed off as a "loving" approach,

and because of that, many Christians have accepted this movement uncritically; however, a closer look reveals that relative beauty is not loving at all. It is fundamentally anti-biblical, and therefore, it should not surprise us that it has been ineffective. *Aesthetic relativism is not the antidote to our problem of self-image, but more likely the cause of it.* What if the biblical view of objective beauty would provide women with a healthy self-image while also nurturing an environment of true diversity and acceptance among all women? What if we left behind the creed that “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder!” and what if we pursued the Bible’s doctrine of a beauty that is not dependent on the eyes of flawed beholders? What if we pursued the courageous mission of perceiving the beauty rarely seen: the beauty not beheld? Let’s dive in.



WEEK ONE

The background is an abstract, textured composition. The top half is dominated by dark teal and navy blue tones, with some lighter teal highlights. The bottom half transitions into a mix of brown, tan, and white, suggesting a landscape or a sky with clouds. The overall texture is painterly and layered.

The
P E R C E I V E D
Self

Where It
ALL BEGAN

What They
TELL YOU:

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder!”

READ GENESIS 1



What God
TELLS YOU:

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

GENESIS 3:6



If we want to understand identity and beauty in a biblical way, we must start at the very beginning. All throughout the creation narrative, we hear the repetition of God's satisfaction in his handiwork. Each day's creative work is bookended with two repeating statements. They go on as if a drum beat throughout the whole narrative: "And God said..." then "And God saw..." "And God said..." then "And God saw."

First, God's word is creating, and then his eyes are evaluating. In other words, his command brings something out of nothing, and his perception beholds that the "something" is good. Not one creation is made without the command of his word, and not one creation is left without his gaze of affirmation. One design after the next, without fail, we read, "and *God saw* that it was good." This all crescendos on the sixth day as God reflects on the entirety of his work and this time with all the more emphasis. We hear the pattern begin "and *God saw* everything that he had made..." but we are brought to a pause, a breaking of the pattern, and are commanded: "*behold*" (Genesis 1:31).

It is almost as if the author gives us a moment to try to look through the eyes of God so we too can affirm with him in his last evaluation, not just that creation is good, but that it is “very good” (Genesis 1:31). It is an invitation to bask in the creation through the eyes of God. We are offered the opportunity to look and enjoy alongside the King.

We do well to reflect on the importance of these repeated statements. Clearly, Moses wants us to understand something about *God’s word* (his creative power) and *his eyes* (his evaluation). Moses wants us to know that they are *authoritative*. Only God can create by his word and evaluate through his eyes. Of course, these are metaphorical ways of illustrating God’s power and perception. He does not have a physical mouth to speak words and physical eyes to see things, but these metaphors vividly describe God’s authority to create and evaluate. God creates by the authority of his “mouth” and he perceives and evaluates that creation through the authority of his “eyes.” This connects God’s role as the only Creator to his role as the only Judge. Just as he is the only one with the ability to call things into existence by his word, he is the only one who is ultimately able to judge and declare something “good.” Our text wants to pound the phrases, “And God said...And God saw,” “And God said...And God saw,” “And God said...And God saw” into our minds as if to set the tempo for the following chapters. Because the next time this “said/saw” couplet reappears, there is a new mouth and new set of eyes, neither of which have the authority of God’s mouth and God’s eyes. Hebrew literature clues you into the significance of an idea by repeating certain phrases or by clearly breaking those established patterns. So it is in Genesis

1 and 3. In chapter 1, we are confronted repeatedly with the God who speaks and sees, and then all of a sudden in chapter 3 we encounter, for the first time, a new voice speaking and a new set of eyes seeing. The authority of the mouth of God is challenged by a new opponent: “*Did God actually say...?*” (Genesis 3:1). The invitation to “behold” alongside God is usurped by a new pair of eyes which see contrary to the eyes of God. This challenge to God’s unique ability to create and evaluate is a challenge to his authority. May we carefully consider the consequences of the tempter speaking as though he has the mouth of authority—like the mouth of the God of chapter 1—and a woman who becomes convinced she can authoritatively evaluate things as “good”—like the eyes of the God of chapter 1.

Upon the entrance of this crafty serpent character, it seems as though the tempo set in Genesis 1 and 2 begins to slow down. The song of creation takes an ominous turn. Adam and Eve’s ears perceive a new voice as they confront one whose words question the authoritative word of God we remember from Genesis 1. This is our first clue that something is about to go miserably wrong. At first, the woman seems fairly unmoved by the crafty serpent’s attempt, but her fall comes swiftly. The slowly fading tempo that began in Genesis 1 comes to a screeching halt and is replaced with a disturbing dissonance. Verse 6 of chapter 3 completes the “said/saw” couplet that was begun by the serpent whose mouth *speaks* contrary to God and concluded by eyes which *saw* contrary to God. The result is a fatal perversion and departure of the original “said/saw” statements of chapter 1: “the

woman *saw* that the tree was good for food” (Genesis 3:6), even though this was the very tree God said would bring death (Genesis 2:17).

This is the first time someone other than God “sees” (evaluates) creation. This is significant. We remember the invitation of chapter 1 to “behold” alongside God, but what is alarming here is that Eve’s evaluation of the fruit flies directly in the face of God’s designation of the tree as dangerous. It is not at all like the invitation in chapter 1 to “behold” as God beholds. Rather, what God saw as bad for Eve, she now *sees* as good. Based on the unauthoritative words of the deceiver, Eve makes what she believes to be an authoritative evaluation of the fruit, rather than accepting God’s authoritative word, and submitting her eyes to his vision of the good. Eve refuses the invitation of God in his beckoning call of Genesis 1 to “behold” alongside him and bask in his glory and in what he sees as good. Instead, she resents the opportunity to submit to that which is truly beautiful and attempts to see beauty in the ugly—a fruit that leads to death. In doing so, she begins to define the world *subjectively*. This means that she thinks that she (as the subject) gets to determine the truth. *Truth is dependent on her. She can make it what she wants.* She can decide through her independent evaluation whether or not something is true or false, good or bad. But notice that not only does Eve redefine the true and the good, but she redefines the beautiful: she saw that the fruit was “delightful to the eyes” (Genesis 3:6). By taking aesthetic delight in that which brings about death, Eve is trying to enjoy beauty (revelation of God’s glory) in that which is ugly (a distortion of God’s glory). This does not mean that the fruit was “ugly” in the sense that it had a malformed physical

appearance. The fruit was “ugly” based on it being a conduit of death. And by taking delight in the physical appearance of that which brings death, Eve makes a big mistake. Eve makes beauty a matter of human subjectivism, a matter of preference or opinion, by delighting in a death-bringing fruit in the same way God delighted in his good creation.

While our culture wants to reserve “the beautiful” to a category of opinion and personal conviction, the Bible suggests that the moment we began to see beauty as something we could determine was the very moment we fell into chaos and pain. When Eve thinks her eyes can “delight in” whatever she wants, she makes a serious mistake. And so too, when we think our eyes can “delight in” whatever we want—and so call beautiful whatever we want—we make just as serious a mistake. Whereas the Bible sees this scene as the root of all evil in our world, *our culture might view this scene as a sort of archetypal liberation of the ultimate kind of woman.* American culture teaches us that it is liberating for women to define beauty on their own terms and forsake the oppressive ideals of others. Eve fits the description of the empowered, independent women our culture tends to praise. She does what she wants and defines beauty on her own terms. She will be controlled by no one. She will not be told what is beautiful, not even by God. It is almost as though we coined the saying, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder!” straight from Genesis 3:6, reading the passage as an affirmation of female empowerment and independence. We tell young girls, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder!” as a way to boost their self-esteem and teach them confidence and independence, but we make the mistake

of Eve. We believe the empty promises of subjectivism. This idea has become so embedded in our cultural perception that often Christians don't even realize its origins in the Garden. Oh, what a pity it is to have culture exalt that which the Bible teaches to be the fundamental disease of humanity!

Genesis 3 describes this spiritual disease in terms of our physical capacity to see. Just as Genesis 1 uses "God saw" as a metaphor for God's authoritative perception of the world, Genesis 3 uses our eyes as a metaphor for our sinful perception of the world. Just as we "see" physical things with perceptual immediacy, we also "see" the world around us with a perceptual immediacy when we evaluate and interpret it. Just as you open your eyes and immediately see without any active decision, so you also are prone to immediately evaluate the world around you and "see" things certain ways. Think of how we use the phrase "I just don't *see* it like that" when we disagree with someone. It means that we do not naturally construe the situation the way they do. By saying we "see" it differently, we mean that we naturally interpret and evaluate it differently. But as the offspring of Eve, we need to understand that we are born wearing defective glasses, seeing the world (naturally and immediately) on our terms, rather than on God's terms. So before we go any further in our discussion of identity and self-image, we must warn ourselves of the danger in the Garden. *We must realize that our perception of things is often misleading: our "eyes" often do not see.* Just like our first mother, we are prone to see that which brings death and *delight* in it. We are prone to see ugliness and call it beauty. Remember the mistake of Eve: The fact that you


“see” something as delightful and appealing, does not make it truly beautiful. Just because you feel something, does not make it true. The goal of this devotional is to help us behold that which is truly good and beautiful, as invited to in Genesis 1, and conversely to train our eyes to correct our immediate, mistaken perceptions of the good and beautiful that we inherited from our mother Eve. We have to get back to embracing what God said and saw, instead of trusting what Satan said and what we saw.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION:

1. *What is a command of God that seems unappealing or unnecessary to you? Find a way to submit and obey that command this week. This is a way to recognize that you do not always “see” the good and beauty that God sees and you trust him enough to do it anyway.*

2. *Identify one thing in your life that you delight in that God says brings death. Confess and pray for forgiveness.*

3. *If someone asked you what’s wrong with saying that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” how would you answer?*



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