

For Disciples and Disciplers . . . A Short Biblical Survey of Beauty

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by David Schrock

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. . . . In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

— 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:4–6 —

In recent days I have become increasingly convinced that biblical teaching, preaching, and discipleship must do more than transmit information. We must proclaim the Truth of God with the same beauty that we find in Scripture. Indeed, the Spirit of Truth did not inspire the Word in some drab and dull way. It is filled with poetry, irony, mystery, and symmetry—in a word, beauty. And the more we see such Christ-centered beauty, the more we will understand God's Word and become like the Word made flesh.

To put it biblically, if salvation comes from seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:4–6), then sanctification is beautification, where the disciples of Christ reflect the glory of God in ever-increasing ways (2 Cor. 3:18). As Kevin Vanhoozer puts it, "The 'holy array' in which the priests of ancient Israel worshiped God (1 Chron 16:29, RSV) now becomes the righteousness of Christ (Gal 3:27), the humility (1 Pet 5:5) that clothes all believers" (Kevin Vanhoozer, [Pictures at a Theological Exhibition](#), 129).

The Place of Beauty in Discipleship

Truly, discipleship requires the disciple to see the beauty of God. Unbelief is a life that refuses (and is unable) to see God's beauty. Therefore, God's beauty is not a superfluous addition to discipleship; it is central to the work.

This means that the discipler must help the disciple see God's beauty. Moreover, by giving Word-ly Wisdom for living a life that reflects Christ's beauty, the discipler is used by the Spirit to beautify other followers of Christ.

In this way, discipleship that gives information only, even true information about the Bible, doctrine, and duty, is missing a key (the key?) to spiritual transformation. Transformation comes when disciples see the beauty of God from the word (and in the world) and are changed by it. To say it differently, discipleship grows best when it arises from seeing and savoring Christ. Thus, discipleship is a Spirit-empowered work of beautification.

To that end, I share a list of “beauty products” found in Scripture. Indeed, beauty is not something we bring to the Bible, it is something that fills the Bible. However, I suspect that we might, in the interest of pursuing truth, overlook this theme. So, the following list from Kevin Vanhoozer helpfully targets five ways beauty is seen in Scripture.

A Short Survey of Beauty in the Bible

This list is for all disciples, but especially for those who are actively making disciples—which should be all of us. Consider how each of these aspects of beauty in the Bible might play a role in following Jesus and helping others follow him.

Nature. The biblical authors ascribe beauty to various natural phenomena, such as flowers (Jas 1:11), olive trees (Hos 14:6) and sunrises (Ps 19:1). The Greek word *kalos* (“beautiful”) expresses more than aesthetic value, however. “It is the right, the fitting, the good, that which is appropriate to a being.” The Septuagint uses *kalos* to translate the Hebrew *6b* (“good, pleasing, agreeable”) in the refrain in the first chapter of Genesis: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31), perhaps with the sense “good form” (i.e., beautiful).

Temple. Scripture also describes human-made objects like crowns (Is 28:5), garments (Is 52:1), clay vessels (Rom 9:21) and even cities (Lam 2:15) as beautiful. Above all these, however, stand the tabernacle and temple. There are detailed accounts of the materials and plans for their construction (Ex 25-30; 35-39; 1 Kings 6-7; 1 Chron 22-27; 2 Chron 2-4). God’s own Spirit filled those, like Bezalel, responsible for making the temple with the requisite skills and designs (Ex 31:2-5; 35:30-36:1). The psalmists exclamation attests to the success of the end product: “How lovely is your dwelling place!” (Ps 84:1).

Persons. Significantly, both men and women are called beautiful (Gen 12:11; Is 44:13; Song 1:15-16). Proverbs makes clear, however, that what truly matters is inner beauty: “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Prov 31:30). The biblical contrast between beauty and ugliness is less about external appearances than the inner character or spirit that either serves God’s purpose or distorts it (1 Pet 3:4).

Jesus Christ. Scripture ultimately locates the glory of God—the visible display of God’s greatness—in the life of a humble carpenter. Jesus is the icon of the invisible God (Col 1:15), the tabernacle and temple in whom God’s glory dwells (Jn 1:14; Mk 14:58), the exact representation of the divine being (Heb 1:3).

The body of Christ. Christians are individual and corporate temples of the Holy Spirit who display the “beauty of holiness” (1 Chron 16:29 KJV; Ps 29:2). The “holy array” in which the priests of ancient Israel worshiped God (1 Chron 16:29, RSV) now becomes the righteousness of Christ (Gal 3:27), the humility (1 Pet 5:5) that clothes all believers. “God’s glory is revealed in humble, self-effacing lives of faith and love.” (Kevin Vanhoozer, [Pictures at a Theological Exhibition](#), 128–29)

What do you think? Can you see how beauty is central to the biblical story? Can you see how necessary it is for Christian discipleship and disciple-making? I hope so.

Without beauty, bland truth will miss the glory and goodness of God, which is to say that truth taught blandly misses the truth of God’s truth (i.e., the beauty of God’s truth). Additionally, it leaves disciples susceptible to counterfeit “beauties” and hungry for true glory. Ultimately, this

is why beauty matters—because when it is God’s beauty, it strengthens faith, hope, and love and galvanizes disciple against the “beauty” of false gospels.

If you are interested in considering beauty in the Bible further, look to Jonathan Edwards who regularly dwelt on this theme and the importance of delighting in the God of creation and redemption. For an introduction to his views on beauty, see [*Jonathan Edwards on Beauty*](#) compiled and edited by Owen Strachan and Doug Sweeney. Also, consider Kevin Vanhoozer’s [*Hearers and Doers: A Pastor’s Guide to Making Disciples Through Scripture and Doctrine*](#).

Soli Deo Gloria, ds