

You are a true Christian then, if you love what you once thought little of, and supremely value what is true beauty, the highest form of beauty, Christ Himself. There are the particulars to think of as you grow in Christ, the shaping of the thinking about beauty in the smaller matters. But the big thing, the true difference between a genuine Christian and a non-Christian, whether that one is acting religious or not, is that there is a love for Christ as the most beautiful One. We may correctly ask ourselves, "Has the change occurred?"

And the *living out* of the Christian life, on the basis of that love of true beauty, is to love what Christ loves. Loving Christ and loving what He loves, then, become the distinguishing marks of a true Christian.

Christ is pure beauty. If you see Him that way, then you will not hold out for any more substitutions.



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## *The Love of Beauty*

Jim Elliff



I know beauty when I see it. I am now out-of-doors in the morning on a spring day, drinking coffee with the right kind of cup, a light breeze flowing over my shoulder, the prospect of a useful day (which is the best day for me) and a sense of God's hand planning all events. It is the convergence of likable things made even more desirable by all the days not so perfect.

I have had other days, strung tight with tension, pending doom, sadness and huge loss, conflict at every turn, dreaded obligations. Like you, I've experienced my share of anxiety. I have also seen a lot. My Christianity puts me into the lives of people with sometimes overwhelming addictions and rancor in their lifestyles. I delve into their lives and seek to help, but what I'm dealing with is certainly ugly and distasteful. I have also done my share of truly ugly things.

Within me is the longing for beauty, and the repulsion of non-beauty. I am convinced that I have the normal longings of all of us. We are made for beauty.

Our concept of beauty will vary, distorted by what theologians call "the Fall." That is a way of speaking of the evil present within us permeating all aspects of our person. This causes one woman to long for an illicit affair and call it beautiful, or another man to crave a power

over others and brag about it. The person has a way of working on his mind so that the thing pursued is reclassified as “beautiful.” He knows it is not; at least a thinking person knows it is not. But his sense of beauty is twisted according to indwelling sin.

In a sense, the fallen individual (and that is all of us apart from Christ) sees beauty from a distance. It looms there, over the horizon, in a mist—an order, simplicity, true love and caring, heaven, forgiveness, reconciliation, God Himself. He has to *say* he loves what is left-over, for all the really good aspects of life are taken by God. God is the originator of them, and as long as the individual chooses to reject God on his terms, he has to play with the leftovers and call them good or beautiful. He will labor to convince himself of their beauty.

To go further, consider that we are one with our desires. We are, in fact, hopelessly bound to them. We cannot love what we do not love. That strange sentence is a way of saying that we do not have the power of contrary choice—of choosing against what we love or choosing what we do not love. If then our concept of beauty is distorted and we will not love Christ, we are locked into an insurmountable difficulty.

In a powerful way this is where true Christianity makes a profound difference. Man finds himself in this miasma of desires distorted by the Fall. He chooses against God. Christ is not lovely to him. In some cases he may become a bit religious, but mere religion may be just another way of projecting himself as different than he really is. The other word for this is pride, and that is hardly the point. Or he reengineers God to be his errand boy so that he can, again, *be his own God*. Man

is born with this kind of disinclination to God and Christ and the way of true Christianity. “No one seeks God,” said Paul in Romans 3: 11. So man’s natural desires are tragically pro-ego and anti-God.

Authentic Christianity involves this radical, and I must say, supernatural, reversion of the bondage to our egoism. The true Christian has experienced a change in desires. How can a person be made to love what he did not love? It is not possible humanly. That is why I say it is supernatural. The Bible asserts the impossibility of this when we read the words, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also [if that impossible thing were possible] do good who are accustomed to do evil.” (Jer. 13: 23)

The sum of Christianity is this. On the outside it is the saving objective work of Christ in living a perfect life as God on earth, dying as a substitute for sinful people like you and me, and then rising again in history (on a real day just like today), conquering the power of sin and death on the behalf of those he came to deliver. We are told to come to Christ, not on the basis of our “fallen” works as if salvation were our job, but to put our trust in Christ and to follow Him out of love. Our following is not the means of our salvation, but the result and the evidence.

But in terms of the individual, the desire for a coming to Christ is not there without a change in the pursuit of true beauty versus the artificial. And though a friend tries to make you love Christ, it does not happen unless there is something quite supernatural transpiring. The desires must change, and beauty must be redefined for you.