

We have been seeing in this song about Solomon and his bride's love for one another a picture of Christ and the church. This book is as inspired as every other book in the Bible. Peter wrote, ²⁰ *knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.* ²¹ *For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.* 2 Peter 1:20-21 Paul confirms that marriage is mystery concerning Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32ⁱ). What is difficult for the modern reader is taking the physical as a metaphor for the spiritual. The Hebrew culture saw all of creation as a picture of spiritual realities.

^{1a} *Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful!* Song 4:1a To really receive the impact of these words, I would ask you to close your eyes for a moment. Picture as best you can the glorified Christ standing before you (Revelation 1:13-15ⁱⁱ), His face shining like the sun, His robe a brilliant white, His eyes fixed on yours, His arms open inviting you to put your head on His chest. Do you see Him? Now hear Him say to you, "Behold, you beautiful my love!" Do not argue. Just receive it. "Behold, you are beautiful!" Do you hear Him? Can you receive it?

Was that difficult to accept? Jesus could not have said those words in a more powerful way than the cross (John 15:13ⁱⁱⁱ). The cross was the means by which He could make us beautiful. It is the work of the cross that introduced us to the ultimate makeover. Like Esther in the king's court, it is a long process, but we are guaranteed the work will be completed (Esther 2:3^{iv}). He sees us completed even now. Talk about amazing grace! It is so humbling, overwhelming, uplifting, and encouraging all at the same time. I think it should be a regular spiritual effort to experience this. I encourage you to make it a habit to read this song every year. We should meditate on it when we take communion. And if we have a problem with a brother or sister, we should remind ourselves that Jesus says this to them as well (Philippians 2:3^v). The same grace God showers on you He showers on them also. Therefore, we should do the same with one another (John 13:15^{vi}).

^{1b} *Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead.* ² *Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost its young.* ³ *Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.* ⁴ *Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors.* ⁵ *Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies.* Song 4:1b-5

Did you ever in your youth receive a love letter in which your admirer described everything he or she loved about you? Do you remember how it made you feel the first time you read it as you raced through the words to drink them in as quickly as you could? Do you remember reading it over and over and keeping it stashed safely away to read in the future? If you did not, can you imagine receiving such a letter? Imagine the person you desire writing to express what they admire in you. That is how I believe we are to receive this chapter (and the other two descriptions 6:4-7 and 7:1-5). These are the words of Jesus to His bride.

Men, we will have a more difficult challenge as the descriptions of Jesus' loved ones are of a woman, but we too are a part of the bride. Remember that the physical is only an analogy of the spiritual. Our pectorals are not beautiful, but we do have spiritual

qualities the Holy Spirit is developing in us that cause Jesus to be drawn to those us. He made us in His image, and He is restoring that beautiful image (Genesis 1:27^{vii}).

I will not try to draw an analogy from each description. I think that would be missing the point. Remember our parallel psalm, Psalm 45, told us that if we want the king to desire us, we should forget our people and our father's house (Psalm 45:10,11^{viii}). The beauty He sees in us is our passion for Him that far surpasses all other affections, even that of family (Matthew 10:37^{ix}). He is the beautiful One (Psalm 45:2^x), for every attribute of His is perfect, like a flawless diamond with each facet illuminating all others. So, if there is beauty in us, it is our resemblance to His glorious attributes, those that God is developing in our souls. The ones that can be brought out in us are summed up in the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23^{xi}). We grow in love for the Lord and one another and as we do, we increasingly experience the joy of the Lord. Our sense of peace increases the more we trust Him. These attributes are the beauty we see in our Savior and He sees reflected in us, in the same way that the moon reflects the light of the sun.

When I read the fruits of the Spirit, I focus on all those areas in which I have the furthest to go, not on the few that are already developing by the grace of God. This chapter is Jesus already seeing us after we have seen Him. The site of Him in His glory will finish what was not yet complete (1 John 3:2^{xii}). But right now, we are a work in progress. It is helpful to see our current blemishes for by seeing them we see where the work needs to focus while appreciating His grace extended to us. But we also need to keep that in balance with appreciation for those areas we notice are changing for the better. Thank God for the changes He is making in us.

Remember that Jesus is in the timeless realm and when He looks upon you, He can choose to see that finished work. He loves who you are in Him, and who you are becoming. **By describing it as a man would describe his young bride, the passage brings out the passion that Jesus has for us.** What better way for us to relate to a passionate desire for us! God uses descriptions with which we can relate.

Consider that if instead the writer instead wrote something like, "I see the love and joy in you developing to be more like my own and it thrills me." That is true, but it does not grip our hearts the way this chapter does. Every description He makes relates to something we are familiar with and personally experience in romance with our spouse, for He designed marriage to be a picture of His desire for the church.

The woman will describe the man's body in 5:10-16, but only one third as much as the man describes her. Men are moved by sight as much as women are moved by words. There were certainly some kind of flaws in this woman. She even said she was too tanned. But love only sees beauty in her. That is the eyes of grace with which the Lord sees us. But husbands and wives take note. Wives, let your spouse enjoy the beauty of your body and soul, and husbands let her hear the beauty you see in her physically and spiritually. Husbands, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. You should let her be your definition of a beautiful woman. That will help keep your eyes from wandering.

It is hard for us to fathom the beauty of the bride of Christ for she consists of evangelists in India, German Bible scholars, doctors in Bangladesh, teachers in Africa, missionaries in Peru, and the shop keeper in Iran watching for hungry hearts. There are so many features and body parts (1 Corinthians 12:7^{xiii}), but Jesus sees it all as flawless. The weeds within congregations are not part of the body and so they remain unmentioned, as well as our present imperfections overlooked by grace.

We must keep in mind that this is sacred. The world so perverts and idolizes sex and nudity that we think the married couple's physical relationship must be somewhat tainted with all that filth. The Bible declares that it is sacred and even a picture of Christ and the church. The book of Hebrews tells us the marriage bed is undefiled (Hebrews 13:4^{xiv}) Do not let the world's lust corrupt God's gift of the pleasure of married love.

Before Malcom Muggeridge was converted, he told his father of an experience that shook him to the core. While in India he could see the dark form of a naked woman on the other side of the river. He was overcome with lust and dove in to swim across to her. He writes, *"I darted with all the force of swimming I had to where she was, and then nearly fainted, for she was old and hideous and her feet were deformed and turned inwards and her skin was wrinkled and, worst of all, she was a leper ... until you have seen one you do not know the worst that human ugliness can be. This creature grinned at me, showing a toothless mask, and the next thing I knew was that I was swimming along in my old way in the middle of the stream—yet trembling.... It was the kind of lesson I needed. When I think of lust now I think of this lecherous woman."* Years later, after Muggeridge became a Christian, he wrote these memorable words: *"No desert is so dreary, monotonous and boring as evil," and "Nothing is so beautiful, nothing so continually fresh and surprising, so full of sweet and perpetual ecstasy as good."*^{xv} What a contrast between the world's abuse of God's gifts and the joy and unity found in a monogamous sacred relationship of husband and wife. Making an idol of a certain shape of the human body or of the mere act of sex is to see something as more satisfying than our Savior, which is spiritual adultery (Jeremiah 5:7^{xvi}). Every gift from God must be subordinated under our love for the giver of those good gifts (James 1:17^{xvii}).

If we were to attempt to describe the spiritual beauty Jesus sees being developed in us, we might say something like the following. "Your love is obvious in the way you put Jesus and others first in your life and are thankful for opportunities to sacrificially serve. The joy you have in belonging to me and knowing I belong to you is obvious to me and to others. Your peace in the midst of chaos and difficulties displays your absolute trust in me. Your patience with others shows you realize how patient I have been with you. The kindness with which you treat others is my very own flowing through you." You can imagine the rest describing of the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. As I spoke those expressions did you think, "That surely is not me!" I did. But know for certain that if you are in Christ, He is working those attributes into your life. And He will be faithful to finish what He has started (Philippians 1:6^{xviii}).

⁶ Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. Song 4:6 This is no quicky to satisfy an urge. He declares He will enjoy loving her throughout the night, until the breaking of dawn. Jesus does not just love us when we are walking in the Spirit. He will love us until the new day when His kingdom comes and we behold Him in the light of that new day. Everything will be clear then. We will see how His love guided us through life. All that we could not understand will be clear.

I read the last half of the verse to be another description of the consummation of his love with the bride. Heaven will seal our eternal union with Jesus. We will know His love in all its fullness, and it will be ecstasy far beyond any earthly experience (1 Corinthians 2:9^{xix}).

⁷ *You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you.* Song 4:7 This verse bowls me over every time I read it. This is the third time now in these few verses that he tells her how beautiful she is. And as we have seen before, repetition in Scripture is there to emphasize the importance of the truth it proclaims. I am all too familiar with my flaws, but Jesus sees His own righteousness in me and all who are in Him. Again, it is the finished work He sees, and since we are clothed with Christ that is how we appear to Him now though we are still in the process of sanctification (Romans 13:14^{xx}).

Dr. John Gill expresses excellently the idea, when he writes, "...*though all sin is seen by God, in articulo providentiae (in the matter of providence) where nothing escapes his all-seeing eye, yet in articulo iustificationis (in the matter of justification), he sees no sin in his people, so as to reckon it to them, or condemn them for it; for they all stand 'holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight.'*" (Col. 1:22^{xxi}) *The blood of Jesus removes all stain, and His righteousness confers perfect beauty; therefore, in the Beloved, the true believer is at this hour as much accepted and approved in the sight of God as Christ is when He stands before the throne in heaven.* The beauty of justification is at its fullness the moment a soul is, by faith, received into the Lord Jesus. This is righteousness so transcendent that no one can exaggerate its glorious merit. Since this righteousness is that of Jesus, the Son of God, it is therefore divine, and is, indeed, the holiness of God. Did you hear that? *This is righteousness so transcendent that no one can exaggerate its glorious merit.* That is the beauty He sees in us!

Verse 7 is different from the verse 1 in that it adds the word "altogether." It seems he knew she held too low an opinion of her beauty. He is making sure she hears that He does not see her as she sees herself. Are you getting the point? And to emphasize his point he adds, "there is no flaw in you."

I know. I know! We see ourselves as full of flaws. But those flaws are usually sin and the Lord tells us He removes our sins as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12^{xxii}). Fear not fellow believer. Even now you are seated with Him in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:4-6^{xxiii}). "But..." I can hear it from your heart because I hear it in my own heart. "What about the way..." and we go on to tell of our failures and attitudes or struggles with our old nature. Dear brother and sister, God says it. Believe it! Believe it because Jesus said, ⁹ *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.* John 15:9 And when we start to see ourselves as He sees us, we will despise those weakness even more because we know it is not consistent with who we are in Him. We will plead for the power of the Holy Spirit to help us yield to His power to make that change in us. It is the change that Jesus already sees as completed.

These praises are praises that we offer to our Beloved, but since He sees us as His body, clothed in Him, with His righteousness, He sings them back to us. He sees a reflection of Himself in us. The Scripture tells us that as we behold Him we are changed into His image from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18^{xxiv}).

I will close with a quotation from Spurgeon. *How hard it is to talk of love so as to convey the meaning with it! How often have our eyes been full of tears when we realized the thought that Jesus loves us! How has our spirit been melted within us at the assurance that he thinks of us and bears us on His heart! But we cannot kindle the same emotion in others, nor can we give, by word of mouth, so much as a faint idea of the bliss that is found in that exclamation, "Oh, how he loves!" (Jn. 11:36^{xxv}) Come, reader, can you say of yourself, "He loved me" (Gal. 2:20^{xxvi}) Then look down into this sea of love,*

and endeavor to guess its depth. Does it not stagger your faith that he should love you? Or, if you have strong confidence, say, does it not enfold your spirit in a flame of admiring and adoring gratitude? O you angels, such love as this you never knew! Jesus does not bear your names in his hands, or call you His bride. No! This highest fellowship he reserves for worms, whose only return is tearful, hearty thanksgiving and love.

Yes, beloved believer, you and I have had times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and then our faith mounted to the topmost heights of assurance. We have had confidence to lean our heads on the bosom of our Lord, and we have had no more question about our Master's affection than John had when in that blessed posture (Jn, 13:25^{xxvii})... He has kissed us with the kisses of His love (Song 1:2^{xxviii}), and killed our doubts by the closeness of his embrace. His love has been sweeter than wine to our souls. We felt that we could sing, "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me." (Song 8:3^{xxix}) Then all earthly troubles were light as the chaff of the threshing-floor, and the pleasures of the world as tasteless We would have welcomed death as the messenger who would introduce us to our Lord, to whom we were in haste to be gone; for His love stirred us to desire more of him, even his immediate and glorious presence. I have, sometimes, when the Lord has assured me of His love, felt as if I could not contain more joy and delight. My eyes ran down with tears of gratitude. I fell on my knees to bless him, but rose again in haste, feeling as if I had nothing more to ask for. But I must stand up and praise him. Then I lifted my hands to heaven, longing to fill my arms with him, panting to talk with him as a man talks with his friend, and to see him in his own Person, that I might tell him how happy he had made his unworthy servant, and might fall on my face and kiss his feet in unutterable thankfulness and love. Such a banquet have I had with one word from my Beloved — "thou art Mine" — that I wished, like Peter, to build tabernacles in that mount, and dwell there forever.

Oh, for more of these Bethel visits, with more frequent visitations from the God of Israel! Oh, how sweet to hear him say to us, as He did to Abraham, "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." (Gen. 15:1^{xxx}) To be addressed as Daniel was of old, "O man greatly beloved" (Dan. 10:19^{xxxi}), is worth a thousand ages of this world's joy. What more can a creature want this side of heaven to make him peaceful and happy than a plain avowal of love from his Lord's own lips? Let me ever hear you speak in mercy to my soul, and, O my Lord, I ask no more while here I dwell in the land of my pilgrimage! Communion

Questions:

- 1 What makes us beautiful?
- 2 What can cause the King to desire our beauty?
- 3 Who is the beautiful One?
- 4 Talk about the beauty of the global bride of Christ?
- 5 Review the lesson Muggeridge shared.
- 6 Review the second Muggeridge quote?
- 7 Can you receive 4:7?
- 8 Review Dr. Gill quote.
- 9 How are we changed?
- 10 What did you take from the closing quote?

ⁱ **Ephesians 5:32 (ESV)**

³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

ⁱⁱ **Revelation 1:13-15 (ESV)**

¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.

ⁱⁱⁱ **John 15:13 (ESV)**

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

^{iv} **Esther 2:3 (ESV)**

³ And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the citadel, under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women. Let their cosmetics be given them.

^v **Philippians 2:3 (ESV)**

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

^{vi} **John 13:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

^{vii} **Genesis 1:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

^{viii} **Psalms 45:10-11 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear: forget your people and your father's house, ¹¹ and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him.

^{ix} **Matthew 10:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

^x **Psalms 45:2 (ESV)**

² You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever.

^{xi} **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

^{xii} **1 John 3:2 (ESV)**

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

^{xiii} **1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)**

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

^{xiv} **Hebrews 13:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

^{xv} Preaching the Word - The Song of Solomon: An Invitation to Intimacy

^{xvi} **Jeremiah 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ "How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me and have sworn by those who are no gods. When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of whores.

^{xvii} **James 1:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

^{xviii} **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

^{xix} **1 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV)**

⁹ But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" —

^{xx} **Romans 13:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

^{xxi} **Colossians 1:22 (ESV)**

²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

^{xxii} **Psalms 103:12 (ESV)**

¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

^{xxiii} **Ephesians 2:4-6 (ESV)**

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,

⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

^{xxiv} **2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ 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.

^{xxv} **John 11:36 (ESV)**

³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

^{xxvi} **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

^{xxvii} **John 13:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, "Lord, who is it?"

^{xxviii} **Song of Songs 1:2 (ESV)**

² Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine;

^{xxix} **Song of Songs 8:3 (ESV)**

³ His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me!

^{xxx} **Genesis 15:1 (ESV)**

¹ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

^{xxxi} **Daniel 10:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And he said, "O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage." And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."