

## 1 PETER 3:4

*<sup>4</sup>Rather, it [your beauty] should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.*

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**W**hilst we are implored from our early years not to judge a book by its cover, it is something we have a hard time adhering to. But scripture is unequivocal: *'Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment' [John 7:24]*. It's hardly surprising – most of the people who saw Christ upon the cross merely recognised a criminal, a man suffering a shameful and humiliating death. All most people saw was a failed messiah – unable to see the incredible truth – God triumphing over evil for our sakes. Things are not always what they seem.

But appearance is important for us. There is so much in how we present ourselves. So many of us feel we have to pretend, to fit in, to look a certain way in order to be accepted. Our perceptions of beauty are based on scarcity; they are temporal and limited; they are a cause for comparison and jealousy, insecurity and lack. But this is not how God values us, and it's not how He wants us to value ourselves.

By contrast, the qualities of what St Peter calls, 'the inner spirit' are abundant and unlimited. They leave us feeling joyful, rather than jealous, inspired rather than insecure. Cultivating external beauty is an attempt to feel good about ourselves. Building internal beauty makes others feel good too.

The women Peter is addressing have little social status. They were often objectified, often seen as something to be 'owned', rather than as individual humans seen and loved by God. Yet Peter recognises that they have a rich inner life – one that is subversive to the expectations of the time – a life lived not for others but for Jesus. Peter affirms that neither men nor masters are the supreme authority, but the God who makes us in His own image.

Chris Jesus – the one in whom God is made – calls us to see people for who they really are. It's a call to really and truly hear and know people properly, to work with God's Spirit who encounters us and opens us up in our deepest places. All too often we tell people about Jesus without trying to hear their story first. All too often we judge before we know the truth. Today we reflect on the true beauty we will surely encounter if we put our trust in God's abundant love, rather than our own fear of not being enough. Only God can enable this.

Let us pray for our five friends, that God would connect with them by His Spirit to their spirit.

The only thing that brings people to God is the person of Jesus and the work of the Spirit. He doesn't need anything else from us, He simply asks our love in return.