

Proverbs 31:30

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.

Analysis

Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. This climactic verse of the Proverbs 31 acrostic provides the theological and moral capstone to the entire portrait. The opening declarations—that favour (Hebrew: chen, grace, charm) and beauty (Hebrew: yofi) are deceitful and vain—might seem harsh or world-denying, but they represent essential wisdom teaching. The word 'deceitful' (Hebrew: sheker, falsehood) does not mean that beauty and charm are immoral, but rather that they are unreliable foundations for human worth and flourishing. Beauty fades; charm manipulates; external attractiveness proves insufficient for lasting value or happiness. The contrast structure—'but a woman that feareth the LORD'—presents the genuine foundation upon which lasting worth and praise rest. The phrase 'feareth the LORD' (Hebrew: yirat Adonai) does not indicate terror but rather reverence, respect, and proper orientation toward the divine. Such fear constitutes the 'beginning of wisdom' (Proverbs 9:10). This fundamental stance—acknowledging God's sovereignty, ordering one's life according to divine wisdom rather than selfish desire, and recognizing one's accountability before the Almighty—provides the stable ground from which genuine virtue flowers. A woman who fears God will discipline her desires, seek wisdom, speak truth, show mercy, and order her household toward righteousness. The final declaration—'she shall be praised'—represents not mere social flattery but authentic recognition. The Hebrew verb halal (praise, glory) indicates genuine honor given because of real worth. This is distinct from the 'favour' and 'beauty' that can purchase flattery regardless of character. The praise of a woman who fears God carries weight because it

acknowledges genuine excellence in living. The verse teaches that durable praise, lasting reputation, and authentic human worth flow from orientation toward God and pursuit of wisdom. This is the ultimate answer to the opening question: 'Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.' She is found not through searching for physical beauty or charm, but by recognizing in any woman the orientation toward God that produces true virtue.

Historical Context

This final verse of the Proverbs 31 acrostic provides theological grounding for the entire portrait by shifting the foundation from social and economic achievement to spiritual orientation. While the preceding verses celebrate the woman's industry, intelligence, and capabilities, this verse reveals that these virtues are properly understood as emanating from her fear of God. This theological emphasis reflects the consistent perspective of biblical wisdom literature: genuine wisdom and virtue rest on proper relationship with God rather than on human cleverness or effort alone. The reduction of favour and beauty to deceptiveness and vanity might seem culturally surprising given the surrounding passages' celebration of material success and public recognition. However, wisdom literature consistently maintained a paradoxical perspective: the good things of creation (wealth, reputation, beauty, honor) are genuinely good but must not become foundational to one's identity and security. When they do, they become deceiving because they are inherently unstable. The wise person enjoys these goods without depending on them and orders life around more stable foundations. By placing this truth-telling at the climax of the acrostic, the poet emphasizes that all the preceding virtues (economic skill, household management, generosity, industry) are properly understood as expressions of a deeper reverence for God. In Second Temple Judaism, the Proverbs 31 passage took on heightened significance as a portrait of ideal womanhood that integrated practical virtue with theological orientation. Early Christian communities would later engage this passage with particular intensity, especially the instruction about women's roles and worth. The passage's balanced perspective—celebrating women's actual capabilities and economic contributions while grounding all virtue in relationship with God—provided a framework that elevated women's dignity beyond either denigration or unfounded idealization. The emphasis on fear of God applies universally to both men and

women, suggesting that gender-specific roles operate within a larger context of universal accountability before God.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. Why might wisdom literature speak of beauty and charm as 'deceitful'? What makes these things unreliable as foundations for human worth or flourishing?
2. How is the 'praise' mentioned at the end of this verse different from the 'favour' mentioned at the beginning? What accounts for the difference in stability and authenticity?
3. What does 'fearing the LORD' mean in this context, and how does this theological orientation produce the practical virtues described in the preceding verses?
4. The passage presents both the practical achievements (economic activity, household management) and spiritual foundation (fearing God). How do these relate to each other? Is one dependent on the other?
5. How should this verse inform the way we understand and evaluate human worth, especially in cultural contexts that heavily emphasize physical beauty and social status as measures of value?

Interlinear Text

שׁ	קָרָ	בְּ	חָנָ	פִּ	יְ	אֲשֶׁ	הָ	וּרְאָתָ	הִ	הִ
is deceitful	Favour	is vain	and beauty	but a woman		that feareth		the LORD		
H8267	H2580	H1892	H3308	H802		H3373		H3068		
וְ	אֵ	תִּתְהִלֵּ	לְ:							
H1931		she shall be praised								
		H1984								

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 1:7 (References Lord): The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 11:22 (Parallel theme): As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.

Proverbs 8:13 (References Lord): The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

1 Peter 1:24 (Parallel theme): For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

Psalms 147:11 (References Lord): The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (Resurrection): Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

Proverbs 6:25 (Parallel theme): Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids.

Luke 1:6 (References Lord): And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

1 Peter 1:7 (Resurrection): That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

2 Samuel 14:25 (Resurrection): But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.