



Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Ephesians 4:14-15 NIV

MONDAY LAST THIS WRITER AND HIS GOOD WIFE suffered through something we had until then avoided at all costs. In three and a half decades of wedded bliss we never had permitted such an outrage upon our respective persons. It was brutal. It was painful. It was, in a sense, humiliating. But, for the common good and the enrichment of posterity, we did it. We clenched our teeth and we did it.

We sat for our portrait.

Mind you, it wasn't our idea. No, after a long run of thoroughly respectable, perfectly adequate, text-only directories, our church (bless the elders) decided it was high time to spruce things up a bit with a *pictorial* directory.

Well then, what's a body to do. What is one to do when one is a few doors past middle-age, more than a few stone beyond svelte, and in possession of a thinning pate for which hair is becoming only a wistful memory. One, of course, convinces oneself that one is far too old for unseemly vanity, and, sigh, goes ahead and does it. Besides, no one wants to be relegated to that embarrassing last page of the directory wherein are listed the names of all the members who either didn't show up for their sitting or opted to, instead, go with their high school yearbook picture from 1973.

The Pitch

Our appointment was for six-o'clock, and the waiting area felt like that cold corner of the gymnasium where all the wallflowers sit while waiting for the quarterback or head cheerleader to ask them to dance. And our nervousness was not assuaged when at last the door flew open and the photographer emerged. Clearly he had been mainlining caffeine since the early hours of the day.

He was as hyper as a ten-year-old living on Frosted Flakes and Coca-Cola.

“Hey! How ya doin’? Right through here. Beautiful, beautiful. David can sit right here—right here. Linda-super-model right here. That’s it, nudge right in there. <flash> Hey, where ya from? What’s that? Where’s that? Oh yeah, great—great! <flash> Is that east of Indianola? West, huh. Yeah great. Linda-super-model. Fabulous!” <flash>

Would the torment never end.

After another wait in wallflower purgatory, we were ushered into the sticky lair of the sales pitch. Immediately we were shown the dramatic contrast between a woman’s face lined by the ravages of time, and the same face magically transformed into reawakened youth. Intended Lesson: One would have to be a drooling idiot not to pay extra and have one’s glorious visage retouched.

“Hey, how ya doin’? Take a seat right here on the left. How ya doin’? Where ya from? Winterset? Is that east of Indianola? Now let’s see what I can do for ya here.”

Lord, just take me now.

Acceptable Behavior

No one expects to sit down for a portrait and calmly discuss the finer points of premillennialism vs. postmillennialism theology. These two fine gentlemen had a job to do, and they were doing what was necessary to make a living at it. God bless them. It is surely a miracle that *they* weren’t drooling idiots by the end of the day. But no one beyond the age of eighteen believes that they really were interested in where we live, or that Linda (as beautiful as she may be to her devoted husband) really looks like a supermodel. They were simply employing a tool of their trade—artifice—to persuade willing subjects to cooperate quickly and efficiently.

However, while artifice and guile can be acceptable behavior for traveling photogs, it cannot be acceptable behavior within the body of Christ.

For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom

but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.

2 Corinthians 1:12 NKJV

Jesus put it more succinctly:

“But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”

Matthew 5:37 NKJV

In the world in which we live such artifice and guile are perfectly normal. Indeed, such behavior is considered an essential tool for modern survival. Reputations are won, and fame and fortune come to those who build themselves up from a shaky foundation of fast talk and questionable integrity.

But Christians are not of this world, and we are not to subscribe to the same rules of behavior.

When it suits their purpose for the moment, the uninformed love to paint a picture of Jesus as a first century flower child, dispensing daisies and sweetness with a simpering simplicity and a wan smile. But that is not the Jesus of the Bible. Go ahead and read all those words colored red and you will soon discover that the God/Man was quick to call a spade a spade. Whether addressing a follower, a family member, or a religious leader, Jesus spoke the truth with a remarkable clarity and directness.

Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you.”

One of the lawyers said to Him in reply, “Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too.” But He said, “Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you

yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers.”

Luke 11:37-41,45-46

The followers of Jesus today must also be followers of the truth. They are to speak to each other with consideration, but also with clarity and integrity. Superficiality is a trait of the world—not the body of Christ. We are to speak to each other—and, indeed, everyone around us—as if Jesus Himself were a part of the conversation.

For, of course, He is. 

...not walking in craftiness...

This means not resorting to something simply to make your own point. This is a terrible trap. You know that God will only allow you to work in one way—the way of truth. Then be careful never to catch people through the other way—the way of deceit. If you act deceitfully, God’s blight and ruin will be upon you. What may be craftiness for you, may not be for others—God has called you to a higher standard. Never dull your sense of being your utmost for His highest—your best for His glory.

Oswald Chambers

