

## CHAPTER ONE

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# Outward Appearance: Yearning To Be Accepted

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Historically, society has taught, "Members of a civilized society need to abide by and internalize societal norms and socially acceptable rules to be accepted by the local community and to avoid being a target of criticism and ostracized by the local community."

While these norms / rules tend to be taught during childhood development by a child's parent(s) or guardian(s), societal norms and socially acceptable rules are sometimes influenced and changed to match the attitudes and behaviors of the people around us.

In June of 1999, Tanya L. Chartrand and John A. Bargh published a paper on a study they conducted

consisting of three different experiments on social conformity. In their paper titled, "The chameleon effect: the perception-behavior link and social interaction", they wrote, "The chameleon effect refers to nonconscious mimicry of the postures, mannerisms, facial expressions, and other behaviors of one's interaction partners, such that one's behavior passively and unintentionally changes to match that of others in one's current social environment." <sup>1</sup>

Based on their observations from the study, their conclusion was, "When a person observes another person's behavior, the likelihood of the observer mimicking or engaging in the same behavior automatically increases."

In Genesis 2:18 ESV, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him', we see how God designed humans to

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<sup>1</sup> Tanya L. Chartrand and John A. Bargh, "The chameleon effect: the perception-behavior link and social interaction." June 1999, [https://acmelab.yale.edu/sites/default/files/1999\\_the\\_chameleon\\_effect.pdf](https://acmelab.yale.edu/sites/default/files/1999_the_chameleon_effect.pdf)

live in community with one another. Sometimes, when seeking acceptance from those around us to become part of a community and avoid becoming a target of criticism, we often become like chameleons, changing our outward appearance to resemble the people we desire approval from and want connection with, while our spirit and soul remain unchanged. The term psychologist use for this behavior is normative influence.

Have you ever glanced at someone and instantly formed an opinion about their character or abilities without taking time to know them? What happens when they can't hide their current situation and don't fit into the expected social norm and expectations? How do you react and treat them?

We are reminded in Romans 5:12 ESV, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.", we live in fallen world, unexpected circumstances occur in our lives, or because of the decisions we made in our past, there

are times when we can't be chameleons and blend in with our local community.

When these situations arise, people still yearn to be accepted by their local community. In some cases, instead of being accepted as they are, they tend to be judged by their outward appearance and situation and ostracized. This rejection sometimes gives them little to no **HOPE** things will get better or improve.

When we judge others outward appearance and situations based on information obtained from social media, news outlets, other people's views and beliefs... without taking time to listen to the individual stories of those being judged, we begin to exhibit "Superficial Judgement", "Profiling", and "Stereotyping" tendencies during the judging process.

.Over the years, I have encountered this while ministering to homeless people. People will see news stories about the homeless people in Philadelphia's Kensington neighborhood or out in California and automatically assume all homeless people are drug addicts. While some homeless people are drug

addicts, others could be experiencing a rough time in their life and are looking for a ray of **HOPE**.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” During Paul’s time, mirrors were sometimes made from polished brass and obsidian, which distorted the reflection of the person looking into it. This resulted in people going to still pools of water to gaze on their true appearance.

Paul was reminding the Corinth church, “We cannot understand God’s ways nor understand the depth of His love. When Christ returns, we are going to see God as He is.” The question we need to start asking ourselves is, “When we see people’s outward appearance, do we see them through the lens of the social norms / rules we are told to follow, the ancient mirror, and reduce any **HOPE** for a future they may have or do we see them as God sees them, still pools of water, to give them **HOPE** for a future?”

For those who currently feel ostracized or isolated by society or your local community, God sees you and wants you to have **HOPE**. Psalm 33:13 ESV reminds us, “The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man;” God is omniscient, all-knowing, and is actively involved in our day-to-day lives. Sometimes all we need to do is cry out to God with our hearts and listen for His response.