

Ephesians Series

Lesson #239

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Dean Bible Ministries

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Excellence in Song
Ephesians 5:18–21; Colossians 3:16



EPHESIANS

THE WEALTH, WALK
& WARFARE
OF THE BELIEVER

Introduction:

***A vast variety of differences from church to church. Why?**

What are Our Assumptions?

Summary:

- **The Scripture is our sole authority on worship.**
- **God and God alone defines worship.**
- **But how do we evaluate music? Is that not a matter of personal taste? Or culture? (Subtext: good and bad music, art, literature, poetry, etc. are relative to culture and personal taste.) Is this true?**

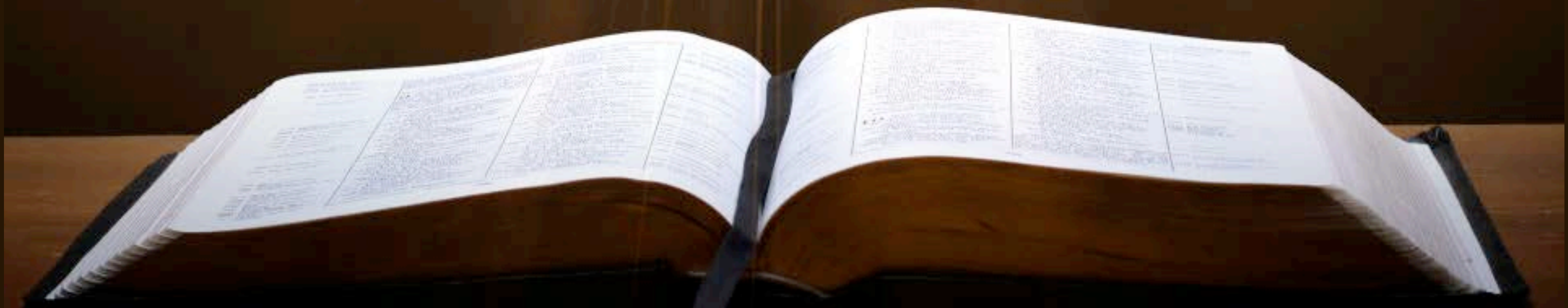
**What the Bible Teaches
About**

**The Immensity
of God**



**What the Bible Teaches
About**

**The Holiness
of God**



**What the Bible Teaches
About**

The Meaning of Worship



Common assumptions which govern contemporary understanding of music in the church:

- **that the music should be attractive to the visitors.**
- **that “new song” means to consistently have music that is recent and contemporary.**
- **that the criteria for evaluating worship is what it does to us on the inside, how it makes me feel, and that it should be uplifting and positive.**

What We Have Learned

- 1. Eph. 5:18/Col. 3:16 both list hymn singing *first* in the list of results of a life filled with the Word of God by means of the Holy Spirit.**
- 2. One primary purpose of hymn singing is to teach one another and admonish/correct one another.**
- 3. Other purposes:**
 - to express our joy for God's work in our lives (defense, Psa. 5:11, 63:7; His grace to us, Psa. 13:6, 59:16; remembering His works, Psa. 30:4)**
 - to declare His name among His people, Psa. 9:11**
 - to remind us of what God has done for us and challenge us to live in light of His purposes and grace.**

What We Have Learned

- 4. Singing is not about evangelism, making non-Christians comfortable, attracting people to a local church.**
- 5. Singing is not about how it makes us feel, but about describing and declaring who God is and what He has done.**
- 6. Hymns, both music and words, must be evaluated according to some standard.**
- 7. The music should support lyrics that help us transcend the here and now to focus on the eternal, transcendent, unchanging, eternal God.**

**What the Bible Teaches
About**

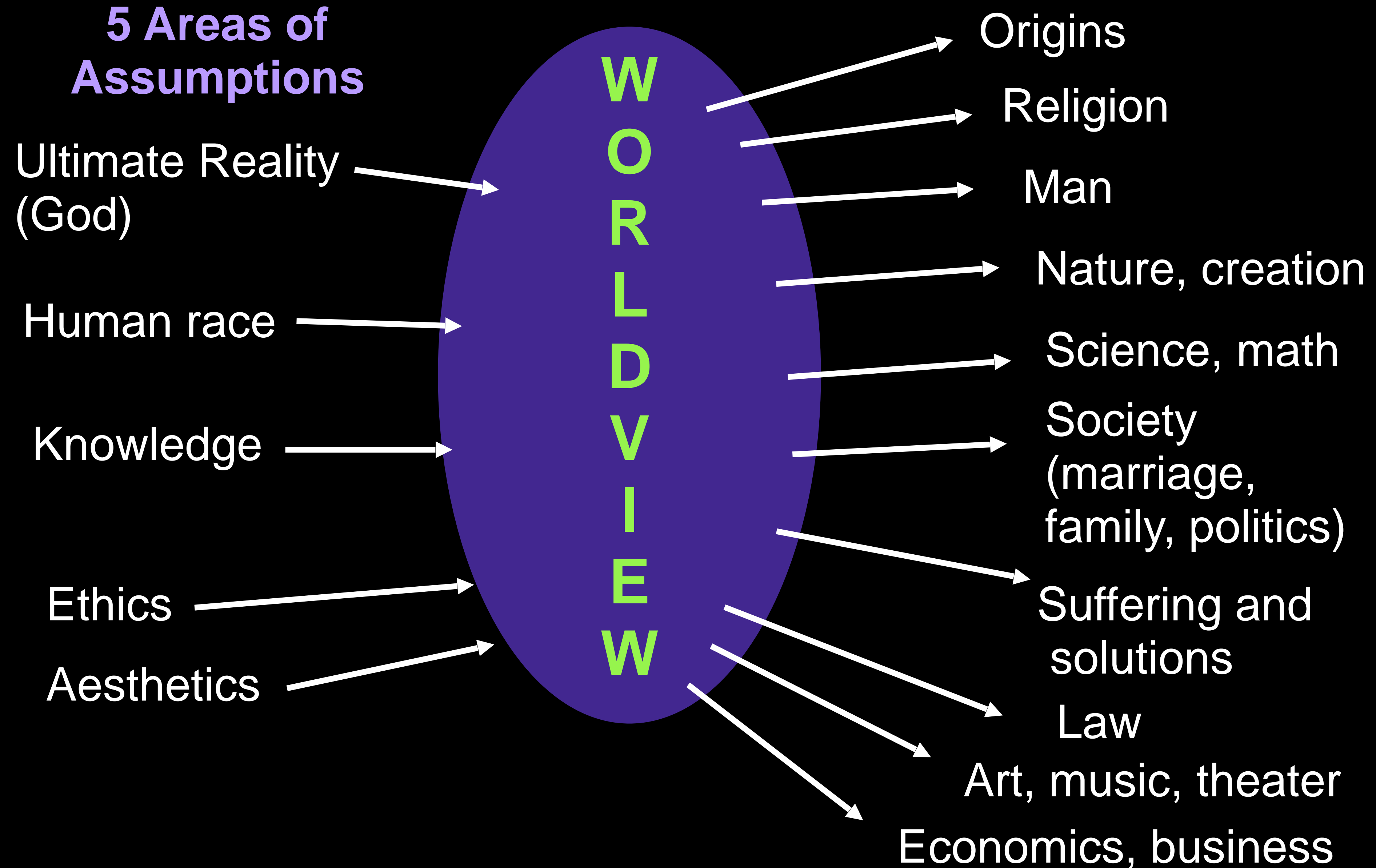
Worldview and Beauty



From what source do our ideas of beauty derive?

Are there external, objective standards for beauty, for “good” art, “bad” art; “good” music, “bad” music?

The Worldview Mixmaster



CULTURE

1. The popular meaning:

The quality in a person or society that arises from a concern for what is regarded as excellent in arts, letters, manners, scholarly pursuits, etc.

2. The meaning here:

The beliefs and behaviors that characterize a group of people, from a small group such as a family or team, to a large group such as an ethnic group or national entity.

The beliefs influence the values, priorities, actions of a group of people. In this sense, what the Bible speaks of as worldliness is really the culture of different groups of fallen, rebellious human beings.

GOD CREATOR

TRUTH, BEAUTY
resides in the
thinking of God

God speaks to
everything He
creates or He
speaks to nothing
He creates.

FINITE UNIVERSE

Matter/Energy

Light

Vegetation

Animals

Man

[who he is;

Purpose

Social

(Marriage, Family,

Law, Politics)

Ethics

Aesthetics

(Art, Music, Literature)]

1. The Bible says a lot about “beauty.”

שְׁבִי (šĕbî, “ornament”), beauty in the sense of the ornamentation that makes something beautiful (e.g., Isa. 4:2).

טוֹב (tôb, “good”), occasionally used to describe physical beauty, usually in phrases like “good (tôb) of appearance.”

תִּפְאָרָה (tip̄ārâ), to beautify, glorify.

Words expressing Aesthetic excellence:

- **Glorious**
- **Magnificent**
- **Majestic**
- **Splendid**
- **Beautiful**
- **Excellent**

1. Standards for “beauty” are used by God from the beginning of Creation, Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25.

Gen. 1:4, “And God saw the light, that it was good;”

Gen. 1:10, “... And God saw that it was good.”

Gen. 1:12, “... And God saw that it was good.”

Gen. 1:18, “... And God saw that it was good.”

Gen. 1:21, “... And God saw that it was good.”

Gen. 1:25, “... And God saw that it was good.”

In some passages (1 Sam. 9:2; 1 Kings 20:3; Dan. 1:15) it specifically describes that which is agreeable to the sight or senses. Elsewhere it refers to that which gives pleasure to our higher nature (1 Sam. 25:8; Esther 2:7, 8:17, 9:19, 9:22; Zech. 8:19; Mal. 2:17).

1 Sam. 9:2, “And he had a choice and handsome son whose name was Saul. There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.”

1 Kings 20:3, “ ‘Your silver and your gold are mine; your loveliest wives and children are mine.’ ”

Dan. 1:15, “And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies.”

“Handsome,” “loveliest,” and “better,” all translate *tov* in these passages.

Esth. 2:7, “And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle’s daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.”

Esth. 5:9, “So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai.”

Esth. 8:5, “and said, ‘If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight and the thing seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who are in all the king’s provinces.’ ”

2. The Bible says a lot about “beauty.”

יָפִי (yōpî) “beauty”, noun,

יָפָה (yāpâ) “to be beautiful”,

יָפֵה (yāpeh) “beautiful”.

2 Chron. 20:21, “And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying:”

Psa. 45:11, “So the King will greatly desire your beauty; Because He is your Lord, worship Him.”

“It is also implied by the fact that the sense of the term *tov*, denoting a thing that is excellent of its kind, rules out the possibility that the assessment regards the mere subjective response to creation by either the writer or God himself. The use of *tov* in this narrative suggests not just personal delight or pleasure but an objective quality about creation itself, irrespective of any particular person’s response.”

~James Spiegel, “[Aesthetics and Worship](#),” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* Volume 2, 4 (Louisville, KY: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998), 45–46.

- 1. Since God assesses what is aesthetically pleasing, i.e., what is good, beautiful, handsome, we should make similar evaluations on the merit of creative works.**
- 2. Aesthetic evaluations are therefore objective and not subjective, not a matter of personal taste.**
- 3. These biblical evaluations are not subjective emotional responses, but based on eternal, transcendent values for beauty.**
- 4. If God makes aesthetic evaluations, so should we.**

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Isa. 28:5, “In that day the LORD of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people,”

The Bible uses a number of terms to express the beauty and excellence of God. These terms establish God as the standard of beauty.

Thus,

God possesses *intrinsic* beauty, which is the standard of all excellence, splendor, magnificence, beauty, and glory.

POINT: When God says something is *tov*, He is appealing to an ultimate standard.

Conclusion: Beauty is not a mere cultural relative, but an absolute, eternal, immutable standard residing in the thinking of God.

3. All CREATION was *tov*, beautiful, but was corrupted by sin. Therefore our experience with beauty, or what we value as beautiful, must be understood to be under the post-fall corruption of sin.

Rom. 8:20, “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;

Rom. 8:21, “because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Rom. 8:22, “For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”

“A further observation to be made here pertains to the way that the cosmos authentically reflects the cosmic artist. Nature serves as an unmistakable self-expression of God. As the psalmist writes, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge’ (Psa. 19:1–2). And Paul notes that ‘since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse’ (Rom. 1:19–20). God’s cosmic art bears the indelible marks of a powerful, intelligent, wise, and loving being, so clear in fact that we have no excuse for not recognizing their source.”

~James Spiegel

Ethical Spectrum

Sin

Righteous

**Wrong, Sin,
Bad,
Chaotic,
Evil,
Profane,
Common**

**Righteous,
Good,
Ordered,
qadosh,
“set apart
to God”**

Aesthetic Spectrum

Ugly

Beauty



“If it’s bad art, it’s bad religion, no matter how pious the subject.”

~Madeleine L’Engle, author *Somewhere in Time*

Col. 3:17, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

1 Cor. 6:20, “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

Rom. 12:2, “And do not be pressed into the mold of the thinking of your generation (the *zeitgeist*), but be transformed by the renewing of the forms and content of your thinking, that you may demonstrate that God’s will is good and acceptable and complete.” [RD]

Php. 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Php. 4:9, “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

true, noble (honorable), just, pure, lovely, good report (commendable), virtue (moral excellence), praiseworthy

Contrasting Popular Culture Values vs. Values of Traditional and High Culture

Popular Culture	Traditional and High Culture
Focuses on the new	Focuses on the timeless
Discourages reflection	Encourages reflection
Pursued casually “to kill time”	Pursued with deliberation, thought, intentionality
Gives us what we want, tells us what we already know	Offers us what we could not have imagined
Relies on instant accessibility; encourages impatience	Requires training; encourages patience
Emphasizes information and trivia	Emphasizes knowledge and wisdom
Encourages quantitative concerns	Encourages qualitative concerns
Celebrates fame	Celebrates ability
Appeals to sentimentality	Appeals to appropriate proportioned emotions
Content and form governed by requirements of the market	Content and form governed by requirements of created order

~Kenneth Myers. *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* Wheaton: Crossway, 1989

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Contrasting Popular Culture Values vs. Values of Traditional and High Culture

Popular Culture	Traditional and High Culture
Formulas are the substance	Formulas are the tools
Relies on spectacle, tending to violence and prurience	Relies on formal dynamics and the power of symbols (including language)
Aesthetic power in reminding of something else	Aesthetic power in intrinsic attributes
Individualistic	Communal
Leaves us where it found us	Transforms our sensibilities
Incapable of deep or sustained attention	Capable of repeated, careful attention
Lacks ambiguity	Allusive, suggests the transcendent
Reflects the desires of the self	Encourages understanding of others
Tends toward relativism	Tends toward submission to standards

~Kenneth Myers. *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* Wheaton: Crossway, 1989

Standards:

- 1. Human creative activity should be inspired by and reflect what we observe in God's creative activity.**
- 2. Planned, orderly, thought through in every detail.**
- 3. Technically excellent.**

“The first rule in any endeavor, whether creative or not, is technique. For every skill there are proper and improper methodologies. For example, there is a right or best way to hold a brush while painting, to position actors on a stage in a drama, to enhance dynamics in the performance of a song, etc. Each artistic domain has its proper methodology. And while the results look different depending upon the art form (and even between genres within art forms), technical precision is always of the first importance. Artists must attend to the established guidelines of their craft. Abiding by such standards maximizes the desirability of the outcome of the creative process.

“It should be noted, however, that in the fine arts a reasonable amount of room must be allowed for free and spontaneous play of the imagination. This is especially the case in the process of poetic and musical composition, but also in the performing arts. But in any case the artist should strive for efficiency.”

Standards:

- 1. Human creative activity should be inspired by and reflect what we observe in God's creative activity.**
- 2. Planned, orderly, thought through in every detail.**
- 3. Technically excellent.**
- 4. Conforming to Truth.**
- 5. Moral and theological integrity.**

Standards:

6. Purposeful.

7. Display both simplicity and complexity.

8. Resolution.

9. Proportionality.

10. Originality.

11. As God's creation points to the attributes of God, so should our finite creations.

12. Should point to that which is eternal, transcendent.

Negatives:

Disordered, unplanned, simplistic rather than simple, common or trivial, banal, unoriginal, trendy, mediocre.

Words that describe that which is of a lower standard:

trivialize:

make (something) seem less important or complex than it really is.

banal:

tediously commonplace or unoriginal.

trivialize:

make (something) seem less important or complex than it really is.

banal:

tediously commonplace or unoriginal.

“This aesthetic vice deadens the sensibilities of the lay person who is not aesthetically keen enough to recognize it but is nonetheless harmfully affected by it. And it annoys the aesthetically aware person to distraction, or else it puts [them] to sleep.”

~James Spiegel

David Wells, Distinguished Research Professor at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, analyzed several contemporary chorus books and traditional hymnbooks (several hundred choruses).

Almost 65% of all choruses had no doctrinal development or content.

**Almost impossible to find a hymn with no doctrinal development or content
(his study did not focus on the accuracy of the doctrine, only the *presence* of doctrinal development).**

Do trivial, banal music, lyrics, poetry, art conform to the standard of excellence which glorifies God?

***In many situations the best a group can do is what glorifies God.**