Intro:

Unit 26: The False, the Bad, and the Ugly

26.1: Unraveling Truth, Goodness, and Beauty

Like an intricately woven tapestry, God created a beautiful world for man to enjoy and glorify him with his life. The creation is more than merely a sum of its parts, as the saying goes.

"In the Fall, one of the threads in God's tapestry, mankind—which was, in fact, the chief thread—began yanking itself out of the weave, damaging other threads and marring the picture in the process. In Adam's effort to assert his independence, he caused the creation to begin to unravel. The beautiful tapestry became tangled, marred, and diminished." [Ward, 401]

In this lesson, we begin to discuss how this unraveling affects the world of Arts and Culture.

I. Isolating truth, goodness, and beauty

A. Truth isolated from goodness and beauty

1. When truth is isolated from goodness and beauty, <u>moral</u> <u>restraint</u> is abandoned in the pursuit of truth

a. In WWII, Japanese and German researchers abused prisoners in the pursuit of truth

> Example: Germany conducted research into how cold affected the human body: How much exposure to freezing temperatures would kill a man? How cold could someone get before resuscitation was impossible?

b. Presently, embryonic stem-cell research is advocated by many

1) Embryos feel no pain

2) No "persons" are harmed if an embryo dies

2. Is truth at <u>any</u> <u>cost</u> a valid principle? Can truth be <u>divorced</u> from morality? From beauty?

> Goodness and beauty don't contaminate reason. In fact, when one of them is unraveled from the others, the result is ugliness and evil. [Ward, 402]

B. Goodness isolated from truth and beauty

1. When is goodness not true or beautiful?

   When men call <u>evil</u> <u>good</u> (Isa 5.20)

2. In our times, <u>sexual</u> deviancy and <u>immorality</u> are called good by many

   a. 1996 – Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act

   b. 2006 – Barrack Obama said in his autobiography that he opposed gay "marriage"

   c. 2012 – Barrack Obama changed his mind, declaring himself for gay "marriage"

3. Other examples from history

   a. <u>Phrenology</u> (the study of bumps on your head) was a good way to diagnose personality in the 19th century

   b. <u>Slavery</u> and <u>racism</u> called good in former times

C. Beauty isolated from goodness and truth

1. An example to explain: Oscar Wilde, considered himself an "<u>aesthete</u>," a devotee of artistic beauty

   a. Author of the play, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

   b. Character called Lord Henry: "Beauty is a form of genius—is higher, indeed, than genius, as it needs no explanation.… It cannot be questioned. It has its divine right of sovereignty."

   c. Later line: "The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it."

2. What does beauty become when it is not also true and good?
   a. <u>Romanticism</u>
   b. <u>Sensualism</u>
   c. <u>Eroticism</u>
   d. <u>Anti</u>-<u>intellectualism</u>

   "To love God is to love reality as He has ordered it—a reality where truth, goodness, and beauty share a unity in His person. These three things are a tapestry. Trace any one thread, and it will lead to the others—and ultimately to God." [Ward, 404]

II. Attacking truth, goodness, and beauty

"Fallen art and culture can isolate truth, detach goodness, and unweave beauty from the unity they are meant to maintain. Culture can separate three things that were designed to be together. But, of course, art and culture can also attack these three things individually and directly in this fallen world. For this segment of our discussion about fallen arts, we'll focus on one artistic medium: the theater. It's certainly capable of great good, but the following three plays—all winners of major theater awards—attack truth, goodness, and beauty, respectively." [Ward, 404]

Note: We *do not recommend* the plays we mention — many objectionable elements, but they illustrate the idea we are talking about.

A. Attacking truth:

1. *Equus* by Peter Shaffer

2. The play involves a psychiatrist counseling a deluded boy who thinks horses are a manifestation of the supreme god (note small "g" – pagan ideas abound)

3. The psychiatrist's dilemma: do I teach this boy reality or let him live on in his dream world, because truth <u>doesn't</u> <u>matter</u>

B. Attacking goodness:

1. *The Real Thing* by Tom Stoppard

2. The play involves a man and a woman who leave their spouses and marry each other after an adulterous affair.

3. As the play progresses, the woman takes up with another man, only to return, in the end, to the main character who accepts her, because goodness (morality) <u>doesn't</u> <u>matter</u>.

C. Attacking beauty:

1. *Pillowman*, by Martin McDonagh

2. A gruesome story that involves violence against children, suicide, severed fingers and heads, and other grotesque incidents

3. The point of the play is that art doesn't have to be <u>beautiful</u> if only it makes you <u>feel</u> something.

III. Glamorizing sin

A. <u>All</u> of the plays mentioned above won major awards

  1. They are <u>typical</u> of all kinds of art produced today

  2. Their themes are difficult to avoid if you participate in current culture, you <u>will</u> see or hear some such "art" in your lifetime

B. How do Christians get involved in art that isolates or attacks truth, goodness, and beauty?

  1. Sometimes it is <u>deliberate</u> – we want to rebel, to be daring, to shock someone or to "see what it is like"

  2. Sometimes we are <u>duped</u>

   a. We depended on a bad recommendation

   b. Or we failed to research carefully beforehand

   c. Or we weren't expecting an ungodly treatment of a classical subject

  3. Sometimes we see or hear something on public display by <u>chance</u> – it is "public art" or it is "playing over the speakers in the mall"

C. What should we do about art to which we now object?

  1. <u>Analyze</u> why it is wrong: write out what you think was wrong about it

  2. Try to measure it by biblical <u>standards</u>: Was it <u>true</u>? Was it <u>good</u>? Was it <u>beautiful</u>?

  3. Did it <u>combine</u> all three elements, <u>isolate</u>, or <u>attack</u> them?

We may find such an exercise challenging, but is it better to be swept along by the forces of our culture without thinking about them?

Hebrews 5.14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.