

## Intro:

In our last session, we discussed how the world attempts to overthrow God's created order, even in the arts. We used the imagery of the unraveling of a tapestry. There are three ways God's order is overthrown, diminished, or unraveled in our world.

1. Truth, goodness, or beauty are isolated (it is said one can be true without being good or beautiful, one can be good without truth or beauty, one can be beautiful without truth or goodness).
2. Truth, goodness, and beauty are attacked (the arts are used to say nothing is true, nothing is good, and there is no beauty).
3. Sin is glamorized (the arts are used to make sin appealing).

Our discussion today will focus on the popular culture.

## I. Critiquing content (shooting at the low-hanging fruit)

### A. Popular culture defined

1. "Popular culture is the commercially driven culture of media and entertainment shaped by the tastes of ordinary people." [Ward, 411]
2. "Culture of diversion, driven by novelty"
3. "Whatever sells"

This definition doesn't mean that *all* popular culture is bad, but the common denominator in popular culture is the greatest diversion for the greatest number at the lowest price.

Popular culture is a commercialization of art that minimizes quality in favor of maximizing distribution.

### B. Chief criticism of the content

1. Pop culture entertains with sins for which our Lord died
2. Christianity used to say, "No!" to vulgarity and vice, but is too often now entertained by it
3. Attacks on truth, goodness, and beauty are attacks on God who created them: content matters

I've called this critique "low-hanging fruit" — it is relatively easy to criticize entertainment on the basis of content, but what about pop culture that isn't "too bad"? (That is, it isn't *too* vulgar, *too* immoral, or *too* violent.)

We need to consider pop culture at a deeper level — the level of sensibilities.

## II. Critiquing the sensibilities of pop culture

### A. *Sensibilities* defined

1. "ability to receive sensations ... (tactile *sensibility*)" — Merriam-Webster
2. For this discussion, "ability (or inability) to appreciate some artistic or cultural work" [Ward, 412]
3. Sensibilities operate at the level of affection...
  - a. Affections
    - 1) Two words trans. *affections* in KJV, one in NAU
      - a) First is Rm 1.26 (*cf.* Col 3.5, 1 Th 4.5) – generally means lustful passions
      - b) Second is 2 Cor 6.12 (*cf.* 2 Cor 7.15 – sometimes trans. "tender mercies")
    - 2) Literal meaning of second word is "bowels, intestines" (so trans. often in KJV)
    - 3) The idea: the Grks saw "inner organs" as seat of deep, sometimes violent feelings, Hebs. as the seat of deep personal compassion
      - a) In 2 Cor 6.12, Paul says the Corinthians are limited in their affections towards him
      - b) In 2 Cor 7.15, Paul notes the affection Titus has for the Corinthians
  - b. The level of affection is the level of our deepest personal commitments – the things we love, that we have a heart for

4. Sensibilities involve how you perceive art in that innermost area of the heart
  - a. What do you love in art?
  - b. What stirs your heart?

"I rarely meet the young Christian who needs to be exhorted to engage their culture. They seem to consume what everybody consumes, and are in general agreement with the zeitgeist that a steady stream of entertainment is the Fifth Freedom that our forefathers fought for." (Fred Sanders, "[They Quit Making Good Music When I Turned 30](#)," *First Things* (blog), October 21, 2009.)

#### B. Zeitgeist = "the spirit of the age"

1. In the age of pop culture, that spirit drives people towards constant entertainment
2. People in our culture expect us to know the lyrics of pop songs and the scenes of movies
3. Pop culture strongly affects the way people talk, from the oldest to the youngest

"It has become something of a shared religion, the one experience most people in America can relate to." [Ward, 412]

#### C. Christian *zeitgeist* – the general Christian spirit of our age

1. Think about how most Christians live their lives in our culture
  - a. Christian radio
  - b. Christian music
  - c. Christian TV
  - d. God-Tube
  - e. Christian video games
  - f. And of course there are varying degrees of participation in the secular zeitgeist – spirit of the age
2. The content of Christian culture may be different from worldly culture, but the sensibilities develop in the same way

- a. “You begin to expect to be entertained all the time.
  - b. “You don’t develop the patience necessary to be rewarded by more difficult artistic forms like painting and poetry and literature.
  - c. “You’re never just quiet.
  - d. “Your mind wanders when you read.
  - e. “And you think kids who make it through three years of piano lessons ought to get a medal or something.” [Ward, 412]
3. A life filled with diversion is not also filled with truth, goodness, and beauty.

### Concluding the First Part

It is easy to critique content when content is recognizably bad (Romans 1 level of badness).

It is harder to critique sensibility, being immersed in our culture, we are less aware of how much culture affects us.

- Culture shapes our sensibilities
- Our sensibilities are developed at the level of our affections
- We get in tune with our cultural “zeitgeist” with little conscious thought – we tend to ignore how culture subtly turns our affections away from God.