

A few matters of Review...

Making choices: the need for discernment

Is it all bad? What about some culture that seems partly good? Or seems mostly good? What then? How do we decide?

I. Review:

A. Not all cultural expressions are created equal:

1. Some approach closely the standards of truth, goodness, and beauty God created
2. Others defy the standards God Created
3. Still others are somewhere in-between

B. Gaining discernment: a process of time (Heb 5.14)

1. Listen to older, more mature believers (Pr 2.1-2)
2. Diligent search for God's truth (Pr 2.3-5)
3. Dependence on God's gift of wisdom (Pr 2.6-7)
4. Active in a thriving church community (Heb 10.24-25)

II. Stances towards culture (review):

A. Condemning culture

1. Clearly, in every culture, there are thoroughly evil cultural expressions – they are only worthy of condemnation
2. In **addition**, certain kinds of art are fit only for condemnation, since they are clearly contrary to God's standards or attacking God's standards of truth, goodness and beauty.

In cases like these, there is no redeeming virtue to the "art" or the "culture" – the only appropriate response is condemnation.

But remember, CAUTIONS do apply – we need to be sure we see the violation of God's standards rather than making it a matter of our own taste.

B. Critiquing culture

1. To critique means to evaluate cultural strengths and weaknesses objectively, it isn't merely constant criticism.
2. We all need to learn how to critique culture in order to serve our "circle of influence."
3. We need to cultivate a biblical worldview in order to critique the culture well.

C. Consuming Culture

1. A regular experience: "You ought to see..." or "You ought to read..." — encouragement to consume art/culture
2. To consume means to take in the whole thing without critical thought.
3. Consumption is one option for believers in relation to our culture.
4. But we know we are in a fallen world, we shouldn't blindly consume without first critiquing or finding critiques we trust.

D. Copying Culture

1. Another option is copying culture, which everyone does to some extent.
2. Two pitfalls of copying:
 - a. Someone who is learning may rely too much on copying, rather than taking the step outside copying to creating
 - b. Though there is much worthy culture to copy, the tendency in our culture is to copy popular and celebrity culture over all other forms

The danger is falling into conformity to the world rather than being renewed in our minds (Rm 12.1-2)

III. This week: Creating Culture

A. Creating Culture: Introduction

1. Modern education emphasizes fields that tend to result in good jobs. Should Christians study the arts?

2. Every culture in history expresses itself in the arts. Humans are driven to create (giftedness varies, of course).
3. The Creation Mandate includes reflecting the glory of God by human creativity

Creation Mandate: Genesis 1.26-28: in Our image, according to Our likeness

a. What do we know about God at this point in the Bible?

b. He is the Great CREATOR:

- He is “explosively creative” — making all kinds of animals, including
- An animal that eats 4 tons of food a day (the blue whale)
- An animal that makes light with its body (the angler fish)
- An animal that consumes sunlight (the sea slug)
- ... so many others ...
- AND Man, who is made in the image of God

4. If we are created in the Image of God (and we are):

a. Created to Do

- 1) Biblical worldview teaches how to look at the world
- 2) Biblical worldview teaches how to feel about the world
- 3) Biblical worldview teaches what do DO in the world

b. All our redemption chapters emphasize action:

- 1) On Gender: work towards a Biblical view of gender
- 2) On Government: act in support of Biblical views of government
- 3) On Science, History and now on Culture: Act in order to bring your world closer to God’s ideals

c. Because of our fallen world, Christians have much to critique and condemn in human arts and culture.

- 1) In some ways, the works of fallen arts and culture need to be torn down and destroyed.

- 2) But was man created to simply destroy? Does the fall call the righteous man to simply tear down the works of fallen men? What does the Creation Mandate mean when it comes to arts and culture?
- 3) Remember, arts and culture are instinctive works of men, every culture does them.
- 4) When a believer orders his world by contributing wholesomely to the culture of the world he is *rebell*ing against the fallen order and submitting to the divine order.

B. Creating Culture: Motivation

1. Any work of man is subject to varying motivations

a. Fallen motivations include: greed, envy, lust, pride

How can these motivations be displayed by artists?

What can (and should) motivate Christian works in any field?

b. Faith, hope, love: the affections (not the passions)

2. Illustrations:

“What drives a mother to lose sleep every night for months, changing diapers and wiping noses and cleaning spills?”
[Ward, 428]

“What drives teachers to put in seventy-hour weeks and endure the same questions year after year (‘Why do I have to learn this stuff?’)?” [Ward, 428]

- Love

Love—and the gratitude and joy and hope that spring from it—is the affection best suited to drive Christian creativity, just as truth and goodness and beauty guide and shape that creativity. It’s out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks, Jesus said (see Luke 6:45). [Ward, 429]

3. Christians ought to create art and culture for the good of others — this is love

Illustration – sculptor Frederick Hart: I believe that art has a moral responsibility, that it must pursue something higher than itself. Art must be a part of life. It must exist in the domain of the common man. It must be an enriching, ennobling, and vital partner in the public pursuit of civilization. It should be a majestic presence in everyday life just as it was in the past.

Irony: the art world largely ignores the work of Frederick Hart. They say it is “devious” because it is too real, deceiving the eye into believing bronze statues are real people. “Therefore, they were artificial, false.”

Another example: when a Christian hostess invites someone over for a meal, what does she do?

- Prepares a special meal
- Decorates and arranges the table
- Uses special plates
- All of this is culture – a form of creative arts

Why does she do this?

- It could be to show off: Pride
- Or it could be Love

“The greatest motivator to artistic expression is to enjoy something. And you want to share what you enjoy. That should be the governor that shapes your art. If somebody’s not feeling what you feel, you try to tailor your efforts in order to get them to feel what you feel. That’s hospitable. You think, ‘I like this, and I think you should, and I’m going to do whatever I can to help you feel this with me.’ ”

—ZACH FRANZEN [quoted in Ward 430]

C. Creating Culture: Goal

What are we after in considering “Creating Culture”?[the following from Ward, 431]

You were created to create in all legitimate aspects of human culture, and by doing so to live redemptively in God’s world. You may not be called upon by God to change the whole world, but the good cultural creations you come up with *will* make a difference in the circle of “neighbors” God gives you to love: your family, your church, and your community. ...

Positive cultural change on a grand scale is possible, but take a lesson from Jesus: He invested in precisely twelve disciples, and only three of them were really close. He didn’t make all that big a splash. The great majority of the world’s population had no idea that He lived or died. Or resurrected. But that resurrection was a tiny seed that grew into a massive tree. Nothing in the history of the planet has ever had a greater cultural impact. Don’t assume that you have to change the world in obvious ways for your life to be faithful and worthwhile.

A homeschooling mother of six started producing a regular podcast that aims to revive the practice of family reading time. No one but God will ever know the good she has done for other families. A dad who didn’t care for soccer started a soccer league for his sons so they’d have a place to play and grow. A group of Christian young adults discovered a mutual passion for well-designed board games, and they thought they could do better. So they started their own game-design company, launched a website, and got an online video series going. It’s hard to look at these cultural artifacts, these good works, and pinpoint the direct benefits they bring. In a hundred years, no one will ever have heard of them, most likely. Christians don’t create because they have the power to bring permanent good. Only God can do that. We create because we are created in the image of a good Creator.