

CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

January 25, 2009



Aaron Pevey
2009

Series: Identity Beauty

If we're honest many of us are confused when it comes to aesthetics and spirituality. How do the two relate? By our own admission the church has failed to appropriately support the arts community particularly in modern times, but scripture presents a very different exhortation. The call to follow Christ is in fact a call to create. We were made for beauty.

Aaron Pevey, a photographer in our community, strives to capture beauty amidst the mundane landscape of life (see above). Such an approach has a significant theological equal. The God we worship is not merely on his throne in the heavens far away from the 'filth of the earth'. Rather the person of Christ reveals that we serve a God who is

interested in creating beauty amidst the unremarkable. His own vision for what could be surpasses our imaginations.

The eastside prides itself on being an enclave for aesthetic sojourners. The journey towards self and cultural awareness quickly brings us to a puzzling crossroad. The very mediums that we find so appropriate in expressing the realities of the human plight often become the focus of the plight itself. Said another way, our admiration of the beautiful very often becomes worship. As we find in Corinthians 3:7-18 herein lies the problem. Objects of beauty are made to provide enjoyment, not life and it's here we find the root of all sin. Our cultural aims are mired by the

condition of our own souls and the only way to remove the veil of death created by half-hearted longings is through the re-creation of Christ. God the artisan seeks to not only create, but to re-create. As we look to Christ with unveiled faces we are transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory. The result is astounding as it relates to beauty. First, we begin to appreciate one another as creations of the Great Artisan and as such foster a relational culture of grace and forgiveness, love and respect. Second, we are called to support the local arts because it is here that the glory of God bursts through as we appreciate the truly beautiful, that which is provocative and at the same time excellent. Glory unto his name!

Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

Application Questions: 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Christ & Culture: How do they relate?

1. How did the work of Aaron Pevey affect you particularly as you consider the urban landscape? Reflect on his interview with Scott. What did you find interesting about Aaron's commentary?
2. Consider the statement "all truth and beauty belong to God". How does this shape your outlook on the arts and culture around us?
3. How does Phillipians 4:8 and other passages such as Genesis 1 shape your outlook on beauty? Consider the reality that you were 'made for beauty'. How have key figures in your life either affirmed or discouraged you in this regard? How does the call to create beauty impact you today?
4. If you were honest what do you typically envision as the end goal for your efforts in shaping business, art, music, etc? How is it that the personal affections of the heart, which are often placed on worldly objects, impact the culture at large? How does the pursuit to reflect God's glory change our own approach to culture & the arts?
5. Share about a time when it was very difficult to love someone. How could the biblical concept of personhood, namely that men and women are works of art or as Lewis describes the 'immortal neighbor', change the way we love one another?
6. What does it look like for followers of Christ to support the arts community? Share about a recent experience with the arts and what impressed you.

There often exists a great deal of confusion in our culture as to the relationship between Christ and culture. Reflecting on the situation centuries ago, the church had a rather profound and provocative relationship with culture, particularly the arts community. In the contemporary setting we often find ourselves disappointed with the Christian response to the arts. From texts such as 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 we surmise that mankind has a three-fold problem; guilt (our record), corruption (our human nature), and a fallen world. Compared to other worldviews we find the gospel unique in addressing the brokenness of both the individual and the collective. Furthermore the gospel illuminates the relationship between individual choices and the universe in which we exist. The vision of the gospel is cast along these lines as it grants us a new record before God, a new human nature, and ultimately the promise of a new world.

The benchmark reference book on the relationship between Christ and culture is without a doubt Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*. Since its publication scholars have offered a variety of critiques on this text, but it nonetheless provides some go-to categories for our understanding. Niebuhr outlines five ways in which Christians have historically viewed this relationship. The first category is Christ Against Culture. The picture here is one where loyalty of Christ is required and with that the rejection of cultural influences. The second category is Christ of Culture. Here Christ and culture in many ways are seen as intertwined and at times synonymous submitting one to the other. The third view is that of Christ Above Culture whereby Christ is recognized as the authority over culture, but is also seen as one executing a multi-faceted work of grace in our world. This view celebrates Jesus as both God and man without any easy reconciliation of the two. The fourth view is Christ and Culture in Paradox. In this view the holiness of Christ is perpetually held in tension as believers interact with a broken culture. There is no easy resolution between the two. God's grace is acknowledged as working amidst our culture, but there is an acute awareness regarding the difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. The final view is Christ as Transformer of Culture. Here a person recognizes Christ as Lord over all and as such he is performing mighty acts amongst us transforming culture for the sake of his glory. While all five views have positives and negative aspects, City Church believes that on the whole Christ should be seen as a transformer of culture. It's here that we wholly engage with our surroundings participating in the redemptive work of Christ. In this sense our vocation and participation in the arts are given new meaning, the glory of God.

"I have no idea to this day what those two Italian ladies were singing about. Truth is, I don't want to know. Some things are better left unsaid. I'd like to think they were singing about something so beautiful it can't be expressed in words, and it makes your heart ache because of it. I tell you those voices soared higher and farther than anybody in a grey place dares to dream. It was as if some beautiful bird had flapped into our drab little cage and made these walls dissolve away, and for the briefest of moments, every last man in Shawshank felt free."

Red
Played by Morgan
Freeman from
*Shawshank
Redemption*



Photo by Aaron Pevey