

## God's Taste as the Model of Our Own

### I. Taste is not completely subjective

- By “taste” I mean one’s ability to appreciate truth, beauty, goodness, and skill.
- Truth, beauty, goodness, skill: these are real things, which have their basis in God himself.
  - Truth: John 14:6: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (also John 3:33; 1 Jn 5:20)
  - Beauty: Ps 27:4; Isa 33:17
  - Goodness: Ps 31:19; 34:8; 107:1; 119:68
  - Skill: Exod 36:1–2; Prov 8:30
- Jonathan Edwards: “All the beauty to be found throughout the whole creation, is but the reflection of the diffused beams of that Being who hath an infinite fullness of brightness and glory; God ... is the foundation and fountain of all being and all beauty.”
- Example: is there such a thing as good wine? Or is it purely subjective? If someone is a sommelier, has tasted lots of wine, and says about one in particular, “this is good,” is there something objective that they are observing?

### II. What God says that he loves and delights in

- God is the measure of everything. He teaches us what to desire. We cannot say that we love him and at the same time hate what he loves. Nor can we love what he hates (cf. Ps 139:21–22; 1 Jn 4:20–21).
- Things God loves:
  - Righteousness and justice and fairness (Ps 11:7; 33:5; Prov 11:1)
  - Obedience (1 Sam 15:22) and faithfulness (Jer 9:24; Mic 7:18)
  - Truth and purity deep within us (Ps 51:6; Prov 11:20)
  - Faith and hope (Ps 147:11)
  - Skill and excellence (Exod 36:1; Ps 33:3)
  - His world that he made (Gen 2:1–3; Prov 8:30–31)
  - His people and their welfare (Ps 35:27)
- Things God hates:
  - Wickedness of all kinds (Ps 5:5; 11:5; Prov 8:13), especially hearts that love to devise it (Prov 6:18)
  - Pride (Prov 6:17; 8:13)
  - Falsehood (Prov 6:17)
  - Unjust harm (Prov 6:17; Isa 61:8)
  - Hypocrisy (Amos 5:21)
- From these, we can derive Phil 4:8: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”
- Does our taste align with God’s? Do we love what he loves?

### III. God’s two great works of art: creation and the Bible

- We can also derive God’s taste from the two great works of art he has produced.
- Creation:
  - Ps 19:1: “the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”
  - Ps 104:24: “O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom [or ‘skill’] have you made them all...”

- Phil Ryken: “the standards for artistic goodness come from creation itself. They are intrinsic to the physical materials—to the sights and the sounds—of any artistic craft ... What constitutes excellence in these and other art forms is inherent in the art forms themselves, and thus it comes from God as part of his general revelation.”
- Great art reflects nature in some way; we are meant to be copiers of God: we are his image bearers (Gen 1:26–28).
- The Bible:
  - God’s word is filled with variety, with simple prose and complex poetry, with majestic style which reflects the pinnacle of artistic prowess, and all in the service of faith, hope, and love.
  - The Bible does not shy away from the hard and raw things of life; see Joseph Smith’s *Sex and Violence in the Bible: A Survey of Explicit Content in the Holy Book* (P&R: 2014). There is realism, but there is also restraint: Eph 5:12 “For it is shameful even to speak of the things that [unbelievers] do in secret.”
  - What God finds beautiful and celebrates is sometimes surprising: e.g., the cross: Isa 53:10–12.
- How does God’s art help us know what is commendable in human art?

#### IV. Pursuing good taste in Christian love

- Contrary to our culture’s emphasis on “authenticity” as being true to whatever preferences we find within ourselves, the Bible calls us to reject our sinful passions and be conformed to Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29; 12:2; Col 3:10; 1 Pet 1:14). Godly taste is *acquired*.
  - What makes art good is *not that we like it*, but that it reflects God’s glory in some way. Through the arts, we seek to enjoy God.
  - Ken Myers: like wisdom, “aesthetic judgment...requires patience, training, and a willingness to submit to our elders.” To learn what beauty is, we need to be around mature people who know it when they see it.
  - Remember, God’s idea of beauty is different from ours:
    - J. Walford: “a broken beauty can be a redemptive beauty, which acknowledges suffering while preserving hope.”
    - B. Herman: “Redemptive beauty is found, surprisingly, in the face of the aged as much as in the face of a perfect child or female figure—and that surprise comes only after steadfast engagement with the other over many years of committed love.”
- In matters of Christian liberty, we must be careful not to condemn another Christian’s choices of what they watch or listen to: Rom 14:4: “Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls.”
- A brotherly plea for high art (Rom 11:33).

#### V. Questions

- Is it sinful to have poor taste?
- Is it proud to claim to have good taste?
- Is there a legitimate range of difference in taste among Christians?
- Are certain styles of music, or certain genres of TV or movie inherently in bad taste? Or even inherently sinful?