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R. C. SPROUL

How Should I Approach Art?

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Chapter One

Aesthetics in Recent History

When we look at the role of art in the Christian life and community, we find that there are simple, foundational principles about the nature of beauty. If you were to look up every reference to “beauty” or “the beautiful” in the Bible, you would see that the word “beauty” in one form or another occurs frequently in the pages of sacred Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament. To set a framework for our investigation, let’s begin by looking at a psalm written by David, which we find in 1 Chronicles:

How Should I Approach Art?

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering and come before him!
Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth;
yes, the world is established; it shall never be
moved. (1 Chron. 16:28–30)

Two words in this psalm stand out. One is “glory.” The idea of the glory of God is pervasive throughout Scripture. It refers to His majesty, His heaviness, His weightiness, His worth, His significance. Closely connected with His glory is the concept of “holiness.” The psalm enjoins the people of God to worship God in the “splendor of holiness”; the holiness of God and the glory of God are conjoined here with respect to this idea of splendor or beauty. We are called to come into the presence of God and to worship that which is beautiful about God.

Psalm 27 and Psalm 29 also tell us about this idea of the beauty of God. Psalm 27:4 states:

One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:

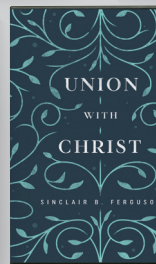
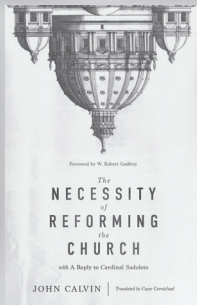
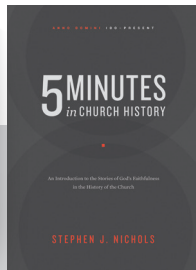
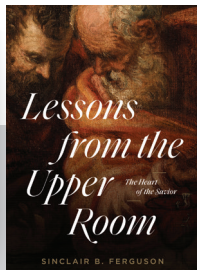
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple.

In Psalm 29, David reiterates what he said in his psalm in 1 Chronicles: we are to worship the Lord in the “splendor of holiness.”

I’m afraid that the idea of the beauty of God has been all but eclipsed in our contemporary culture, both in the secular community and in the church. The Scriptures are concerned about three dimensions of the Christian life: the good, the true, and the beautiful. But we have cut off the third from the other two. In fact, sometimes Christians reduce their concern of the things of God purely to the ethical realm, to a discussion of righteousness or goodness. Others are so concerned about purity of doctrine that they’re preoccupied with truth at the expense of behavior or of the holy.

I’ve heard it said, somewhat facetiously, that if you want to find a church that is concerned with the good, you should go to the Baptist community because there morality is emphasized; if you want to be concerned about the

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