

Important Values for Christian Artists

Faithfully articulating our theological convictions in an artistically credible fashion begins with faithfully viewing the world through biblical lenses.

Theologian and Musician William Edgar¹

The following are some important implications of artistic gifting for Christians as they consider how to express their art in a God-glorifying way. These values will be presented as simple statements followed by thought from artists and theologians for reflection.

1. Christian artists should view their talent as a gift from God and see its use ultimately as worship to God.

Musician and Theologian Harold Best: *The more Christian artists understand that artistic action is nothing other than pouring perfume on Jesus' feet, the more they will be refreshed and liberated in their imagining and crafting.*²

2. A Christian artist should have a sober assessment of his gift and neither over-estimate the opportunities it should give him or undervalue the contribution he can make with it.

Harold Best: *I like to think of the Christian artist in general culture as a redeemed invader or (more gently) as artist-in-residence, a citizen of heaven and a continuous outpourer visiting the archives of culture, calling to account and influencing every artistic protocol. This should mean that among the best of them, the work of certain ones will shatter current boundaries and be radically path-breaking. It may mean that others will take up the strain of a current style and bring it to finer flower. And among those of us with lesser talents (there is no shame in this), it may mean that they will perform their art almost anonymously, making their way in life through the common vocabularies of commerce and trade. In all cases there is but one spiritual task: making sure that there are no tainted drops in the artistic perfume poured on Jesus' feet. "All of my art is Christian" is a far less important statement than "All of my art is offered up because I am a Christian."*³

¹ William Edgar, "Evil," *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God*, ed. Ned Bustard (Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books, 2000), 44.

² Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 112.

³ Harold Best, 180.

3. The most authentic Christian art results from our joy in Christ overflowing into Christian art, not our strategies to do art that is Christian.

Painter Ned Bustard: *It is not the believers' goal to integrate their art with the Faith, rather the art of God's chosen people must spring from faith.*⁴

4. Creating art is an expression of faith and obedience, not of compulsion or identity.

Painter Edward Knippers: *Since He has called me to the work of painting pictures and my art is in His hands, to the point where He could ask me not to paint and I would stop, then I can go unashamedly and ask for His help. I must add, I do not claim that God is painting through me in any magical way. I don't blame my paintings on Him. But He is a very present help in the time of trouble.*⁵

5. The Christian artist should see his art as a way to love God, his people, and the world.

Musician and producer Charlie Peacock-Ashworth: *God has also shown great love to people through his plan of redemption. Following this good pattern, love should also be at the heart of all excellent art created by disciples of Jesus. This is the most excellent way. An artist filled with the Spirit, skill, and ability, asking what it means to love the Church and the watching world as one uniquely gifted, is likely an artist who is making the invisible kingdom visible.*⁶

6. The Christian Artist sees the sovereign hand of God in both his opportunities and his obstacles.

Charlie Peacock-Ashworth: *True artists pray for humility and don't struggle endlessly against circumstances designed to humble them. Instead they see that even difficult circumstances can be a provision from God and an answer to their prayers. They welcome the discipline of the Lord because it is a testimony of His fatherly love and a sure sign that He is changing them incrementally into the man or woman He has designed them to be. Remember, God is working in you to make you like the prime artist, Jesus*

⁴ Ned Bustard, "Okay, You're a Christian and an Artist – Now What?" *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God*, ed. Ned Bustard (Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books, 2000), 10.

⁵ Edwards Knippers, "Subject & Theme," *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God*, ed. Ned Bustard (Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books, 2000), 106.

⁶ Charlie Peacock-Ashworth, "Making," *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God*, ed. Ned Bustard (Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books, 2000), 115.

– not to give you your version of the perfect artistic life. Each day is a chance to decide afresh which outcome you are living for.⁷

7. The Christian artist is committed to truth in the way he lives and what he creates.

Charlie Peacock-Ashworth: A good life is framed by discernment, and discernment comes through knowledge of the Word and the power of the Spirit. Study and pray. Great art is created in an environment of freedom, but the fuel of freedom is the substance of truth. The artist learns to watch both his life and his doctrine closely.⁸

8. While the Christian artist is under no burden to make all of his art explicitly Christian, it would be an unbiblical use of his gift to intentionally create a body of work without reference to Christ.

Theologian Leland Ryken: Sooner or later, writers or composers or painters will say something about the things that matter most to them. If this is true, it is inevitably that the Christian vision in art will be characterized by the presence rather than the absence of such realities as God, sin, redemption, and God's revelation of himself in both Word and Son.⁹

9. The Christian artist rejects the worldly concept of artist as an outsider and embraces his place among God's people in the local church as essential to his life and gifting.

Charlie Peacock-Ashworth: True artists purpose to love the Church despite indifference or opposition to their work....They are eager to find their place in the Body and do not consider themselves exempt from fellowship and church stewardship responsibilities. They love the Church and do all they can to build it up, for how can you love Christ and hate his Church?¹⁰

10. The Christian artist should not ignore his personal responsibility to evaluate the theological soundness of his work.

Leland Ryken: The task of the Christian artist is to portray human life, not to illustrate a list of doctrines. But it is to say that when Christian artists portray human nature, the portrait should be theologically accurate.¹¹

⁷ Charlie Peacock-Ashworth, 116.

⁸ Charlie Peacock-Ashworth, 117

⁹ Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination – Thinking Christianly About the Arts*, c. 1989 by Leland , 197

¹⁰ Charlie Peacock-Ashworth, 118-119

¹¹ Leland Ryken, 212

11. Because the Christian artist trusts God, he will battle selfish ambition, competition, and any pretense of entitlement in regard to his art.

Theologian Francis Schaeffer: *So the man who really loves God, who is working under the Lordship of Christ, could write his poetry, compose his music, construct his musical instruments, fashion his statues, paint his pictures, even if no man ever saw them. He knows God looks upon them.*¹²

12. The Christian artist will see the evaluation of others as an essential help in both growing in their art and assessing its fruitfulness.

Francis Schaeffer: *The biblical message, the good news, is a good news of content. It is here that feedback is important in regard to the style the artist chooses. Let us say, for example that you are playing in a Christian rock group, making an art form of rock. Suppose further that at the same time you are going into certain coffeehouses and using rock as a bridge to preach the Christian message. That's fine. But then you must be careful of the feedback. When you finish playing you must ask whether the people who have heard you play have understood what you have been saying. Have they heard your message clearly because you have used their modern idiom, or have they simply heard again what they have always heard when they have listened to rock because you have used their form?*¹³

13. The Christian artist will resist elitism and care about the accessibility of his art to the average Christian in the congregation

Isaac Watts (on writing hymns): *I would neither indulge any bold metaphors, nor admit of hard words, nor tempt the ignorant worshipper to sing without his understanding...It was hard to sink every line to the level of a whole congregation, and yet keep it above contempt.*¹⁴ (as quoted by Brand/Chaplin 86)

14. The Christian artist must never confuse the joy of creativity with the joy of knowing and pleasing God.

Visual artists Hilary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin: *Art, like any other human activity, cannot but be broken and flawed. It may not appear so, but sin is deceptive. The line between a spiritual experience and an*

¹² Francis Schaeffer, Art and the Bible, c. 1973 by L'Abri Fellowship, 23

¹³ Francis Schaeffer, 54

¹⁴ As quoted in Hilary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin: Art and Soul – Signposts for Christians in the Arts c. 2001 by Hilary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin and Piquant

aesthetic one is very fine, and the two are easily confused. The very feelings of tranquility and delight that art gives us can lull us into thinking that we are right with God.¹⁵

¹⁵ Brand/Chaplin 89