

A Christian View of Culture

I. The Beginning of Culture

A. The Cultural Mandate

- Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

B. The Perversion of Culture

- Genesis 3:15 "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."
- In Genesis 4, **Cain** is the great great great grandfather of **Lamach**. Lamach is a murderer like his father and may have originated the practice of polygamy
- Lamach's sons originated much culture: Genesis 4:19 And Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah. 20 And Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and *have* livestock. 21 And his brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. 22 As for Zillah, she also gave birth to Tubal-cain, the forger of all implements of bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

II. What Is Culture?

- A. **Culture:** The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought.
- B. **Subculture:** A cultural subgroup differentiated by status, ethnic background, residence, religion, or other factors that functionally unify the group and act collectively on each member.
 - Stuart Hall (et al., Resistance Through Rituals [1976]) distinguishes **subculture**, which he sees as informally and intuitively organized, from “**counter culture**” which he sees as more formally arranged and more expressly political and consciously ideological. In this scheme, punks were subcultural and hippies were counter-cultural.
- C. **Multiculturalism:** Often used interchangeably with diversity and pluralism to refer to an environment in which differences among people and groups are recognized, respected, and valued. They are seen as positive and desirable, rather than negative or threatening. Also refers to the combination of values, which reflect this philosophy.

III. The Christian and Modern Culture

A. The Nature of Culture

- **Culture is a reflection** of the prevailing worldviews in a nation or people group. Fallen men create fallen cultures. To put it another way, sinful human nature is the energy behind fallen culture and apostate worldviews are the blueprints that structure fallen culture.

Virtues or vices that do not characterize some cultures might characterize other cultures. In other words, an extreme politically correct multiculturalism is not wise or godly:

- Titus 1:12 “One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” 13 This testimony is true. For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith,”
- **Culture is dynamic and changing** (example: the meaning of words)
 - KJV 2 Corinthians 6:11 O *ye* Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. 12 Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. 13 Now for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto *my* children,) be ye also enlarged.
 - NAS 2 Corinthians 6:11 Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. 12 You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. 13 Now in a like exchange-- I speak as to children-- open wide *to us* also.
 - Judges 12:4 Then **Jephthah** gathered all the men of **Gilead** and fought **Ephraim**; and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, "You are fugitives of Ephraim, O Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim *and* in the midst of Manasseh." 5 And the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan opposite Ephraim. And it happened when *any of* the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No, " 6 then they would say to him, "Say now, 'Shibboleth.'" But he said, " Sibboleth, "for he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they seized him and slew him at the fords of the Jordan.
- **Cultural elements are “in themselves”** either moral (good or bad) or non-moral (no moral characteristics either good or bad).
 - Cowboy boots = non-moral
 - Murder = moral (bad)

- **Many cultural elements** that are non-moral “in themselves” **make moral statements** *because of their use in a culture*.
 - **Words:** the meaning of a word is its use by people in a culture. Some words are vulgar on account of their use, not because they are intrinsically vulgar
 - **The Swastika**

B. Christian Extremes in Relating to Culture

- **Everything is permissible** unless God explicitly condemns it. Or, a cultural practice is all right for the Christian as long as everyone is doing it. (Jeff Pollard and “Christian Modesty”)
- **Everything must be rejected** unless it originates from Christianity. The Genetic Fallacy: “Algebra is incorrect because my algebra teacher was a murderer”: The music of the MTC is forbidden b/c Mormons are pagans.

C. Christians Must Wisely Relate to Culture

- **When in Rome** do as the Romans? (Share what Dr. N. said about his wife.) No. Rather, when in Rome, do as the Romans in so far as you honor God and don’t sin—and that is the difficulty!
- **Christians must first cultivate a Biblical Worldview** and then exercise godly wisdom in relating to culture: “In thy light we see light”; “I will teach him in the way that he should choose”; the Proverbs.
- A **Two-Layered Filter** for Discerning Acceptable Elements from Non Acceptable Elements in Culture
 - **First Filter: Considered “in itself”** and without regard to context, is it Acceptable to God (i.e., morally good or non-moral) or Unacceptable to God (i.e., morally bad).
 - **Second Filter of Acceptable Elements: Considered in its proposed context**, is it acceptable after asking the following

questions; or is it unacceptable (i.e., culturally negative or harmful).

1. What is its cultural meaning? Example: showing up to a funeral of a highly respected man dressed in sweats and a baseball cap:

Malachi 1:8 "But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts.

2. Is it harmful to myself or to my neighbor?

1 Corinthians 8:4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.... 7 However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. 8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. 9 **But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.** 10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? 11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. 12 And thus, **by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak,** you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.

1 Corinthians 10:23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own *good*, but that of his neighbor. 25 Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience' sake; 26 **FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS.** 27 **If one of the unbelievers invites you,** and you wish to go, eat anything that

is set before you, without asking questions for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone should say to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat *it*, for the sake of the one who informed *you*, and for conscience' sake; 29 I mean not your own conscience, but the other *man's*; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? 30 **If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?** 31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 **Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;** 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of the many, that they may be saved.

2 Corinthians 8:19 and not only *this*, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious . . . **20 taking precaution that no one should discredit us** in our administration of this generous gift; 21 for **we have regard for what is honorable**, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

Romans 12:17 . . . Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

D. Christians Must Subdue Culture to the Glory of God

- Fundamentally by means of evangelism:

Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

- By means of doing all to the Glory of God! Excellence in work and in testimony.
- Influencing public policy and legislation (voting and community involvement)