

A Christian View of Culture

Introduction:

Let's begin by defining some words that we'll be using throughout our study.

Moral: "Pertaining to the discipline of ethics" or "conforming to ethical norms"
(Frame)

Non-moral: A topic or matter that does not pertain to ethical norms or discussion. Example: The question of whether pickles belong on hamburgers is a non-moral one.

Immoral: Used to "criticize a person, act, or attitude [that is] ethically bad or wrong"
(Frame)

Culture: The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought.

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."

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.

I. The Christian *In* Culture

A. The Nature of Culture

1. **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 much of fallen culture and apostate worldviews are the blueprints that structure fallen culture.

Virtues or vices that characterize some cultures may not characterize other cultures. In other words, a 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,"

2. **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.

3. **Cultural elements "in themselves" are** either moral (good or bad) or non-moral (no moral characteristics either good or bad).

- Cowboy boots = non-moral
 - Murder = moral (bad)
4. **Many cultural elements** that are non-moral “in themselves” **make moral statements *on account of their pervasive uses 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. Extremes in Relating to Culture

1. **Everything is permissible** unless God *explicitly* condemns it in so many words.
 - Jeff Pollard and “Christian Modesty”
2. **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. Wisely Relating to Culture

1. **When in Rome** do as the Romans? (Share what Dr. N. said about his wife.) No. Rather, when in Rome, we may do as the Romans in so far as we can honor God and not sin—and *that* is the difficulty!
2. **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.
3. A **Two-Layered Filter** for Discerning 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).
 - a) **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.

b) 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.

II. The Christian Doing Culture

- A. **The Creation Ordinances:** Biblical ethics incorporates a “**creation based ethic**”. In the beginning at creation, God gave to man commandments and examples which are the “cookie cutters” of the structure of human life. They include, according to John Murray, “the procreation of offspring, the replenishing of the earth, subduing of the same, dominion over the creatures, labour, the weekly Sabbath, and marriage.”

Jesus and the Apostle Paul asserted the normative character of certain ethical responsibilities by **referring to creation**:

Matthew 19:3 *Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?"* 4 And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created *them from the beginning*

MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 5 and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? 6 "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?" 8 He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but **from the beginning it has not been this way.** 9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

I Timothy 2: 11 A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. 13 For it was Adam who was **first created**, *and* then Eve. 14 And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15 But *women* will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

1. **Cultural/Dominion Mandate, Genesis 1:26-30**

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 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 **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."** 29 Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; 30 and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, *I have given* every green plant for food"; and it was so.

- **This mandate embraces** the ordinances of marriage, procreation, subduing the earth, and labor.
- That this mandate truly contains ordinances that shape mankind's existence, we can read **at what distinctive points God cursed man and woman** after the fall:

Genesis 3:16 **To the woman** He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you." 17 Then **to Adam He said**, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. 18 "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; 19 By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."

- Comment on **procreation** and **subduing**.
- From the beginning, cultural trends were originated by the descendents of Cain. In Genesis 4, **Cain** is listed as the great, great, great grandfather of **Lamach**. Lamach was 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;

- From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible records the struggle between the sons of God and the sons of the evil one. This pattern was announced in the beginning when God cursed the world:

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."

- Early in human history, the **theme of Babylon originates** with the peoples of the earth resisting the commandment of God to fill the earth by making a name for themselves by building a mighty tower, "the **Tower of Babel**":

Genesis 11:1 Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. 2 It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in

the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn *them* thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. 4 They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." ... 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

- In **Revelation**, Babylon the great is destroyed forever and the glorious city of God, the New Jerusalem, is established on the renewed earth. It appears that the **cultural achievements of the redeemed people** will be brought into the city:

Revelation 21:24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

Isaiah 60:3 "Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. 4 "Lift up your eyes round about and see; They all gather together, they come to you. Your sons will come from afar, And your daughters will be carried in the arms. 5 "Then you will see and be radiant, And your heart will thrill and rejoice; Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, The wealth of the nations will come to you.

Haggai 2:7 'I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 8 'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the LORD of hosts. 9 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts."

2. **The Sabbath Mandate:** In Genesis God gives man His example of Sabbath-rest; in Exodus, God spells it out that since He rested on the Sabbath day, we must do likewise.

Genesis 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. 2 By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Exodus 20:8 "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

- In view of all that we've studied about the nature of culture and about the duty of men to create culture under the authority of God, let me propose a question.

Let's imagine that **a colony of Christians** decided to travel to an inhabitable moon on some planet somewhere. Since these Christians were the first to colonize the moon, they have authority to structure the government, laws, and culture as they see fit. Do you think that their constitution will be identical to the Constitution of the United States? Do you think that their laws will be identical with those of the United States? Do you think that their culture will be the same as that of the United States?

**Alright, here we are as Christians in 21st Century America:
what can you do to create culture for the glory of God?**

B. The Great Commission

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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."

- Upon surveying the New Testament, evangelism seems to be the **most important activity** of the Christian for effecting change in the culture. Everything else is secondary in terms of changing culture.