

# Cultural Diversity

## (Part 1)

### I. Why study Culture?

Your culture affects how you describe problems and view possibilities. Your culture will affect your level of joy because it's through your cultural lens that you evaluate success and failure. We need to become conscious of how we learned behaviour in order to unlearn it. We need to be conscious of the debilitating things in our culture and eject them and also to embrace the effective qualities. We have the power to choose. Culture operates at a national level, organisational level and even at a family level. Every family has a unique way of doing what it does.

Key thoughts in this message

- We need to know the impact of culture on society.
- We are called to be clear about the culture we want.
- Culture can be created and we must know how.
- We must be able to distinguish between the different levels of culture.
- We must know what we are called to transform and what is immaterial.
- We must suspend judgment and seek understanding (culturally curious).
- We must be culturally agile.

### II. What is culture?

- It's your values, beliefs and norms.
- It's the way things are done around here.
- It can be created by design or by default.

“The set of shared, taken for granted implicit assumptions that a group holds and that determines how it perceives, thinks about and reacts to its various environments.” Schein 1996.

According to Pettigrew and Frost, Culture has 3 levels:

1. Surface features: values, rituals, customs, forms of expression
2. Preconscious factors: symbols, ideology, and norms
3. Deeper structures: Basic assumptions, worldviews, cognitive and logical systems

There are things in the prevailing cultural mindsets around us that are unbiblical and need to be challenged. There are other things that are amoral and need to be understood. There are also other aspects of culture that are preferences. These must not be treated as sinful just because we view things from an ethnocentric perspective. Sadly, many of us release judgments that defile us based on our own inculturation as opposed to the word of God.

When Jesus came, he spent a lot of time talking about the Kingdom. He was imparting a kingdom culture in the context of an existing culture. He did not stipulate things like clothing

style or what language to use, however He did outline a way of life. For example, He established a new approach to leadership. He established a new leadership culture:

*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

**(Matt. 20:25-28)**

Sadly, there are a lot of Christians who have been very selective about which aspects of Jesus' culture they want to embrace.

### **III. How do you diagnose your Culture?**

1. What beliefs are strongly held?
2. How do parents/leaders teach children/employees to behave?
3. What do people regard as major sins?
4. What do people do in crises?
5. What rituals do people perform?
6. What are the greatest fears people have?
7. Who are the trendsetters?
8. Who are the cultural heroes?
9. What is expressed in the art forms of the people?
10. What aspects of the culture are most resistant to change?
11. What are considered to be words of wisdom?
12. On what do people spend money?
13. What is rewarded and celebrated the most?
14. Who is feared and respected the most?

You will see that your answers result in cultural mapping where cultures are different based on factors such as:

Respect or Freedom; High Context or Low context; Rigid or Flexible; Rules or self-government; Measured and reserved or bold and expressive; Clear gender roles or very distinct gender roles. E.g. the other day when my kids were correcting me. Is that the culture I want to create? They are bold and free but must be respectful. How do I react when my child tells me to be quiet when I am celebrating a soccer goal?

To what extent are your answers in line with the culture you see demonstrated in the kingdom of God? Is the bible silent on some of these things? To what extent does your culture go against best practice for effectiveness and success? There are aspects of our culture that are not good for our profession or business. How do we deal with that? All national cultures need to be measured against the Word of God. Your culture is not an excuse for disobeying God's Word.

Ultimately, we will all yield to God's dominion and authority. This is powerfully displayed in the book of Revelation and the book of Daniel.

**Rev 11:15** *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."*

**Dan 4:34-37** <sup>34</sup> *“But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honoured Him who lives forever;*

*For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation.* <sup>35</sup> *“All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand*

*Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’* <sup>36</sup> *“At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendour were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counsellors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was re-established in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me.* <sup>37</sup> *“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honour the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.”*

#### **IV. What is the relationship between the Church and Culture?**

H. Richard Niebuhr, prominent ethicist and 20th Century theologian wrote *Christ and Culture* (1951) outlining 5 paradigms for churches to relate to culture.

##### 1. Christ against culture

- Live in sharp contrast to society
- Withdraw from it
- Effects of the fall are on everything
- Create our own cultural expression

##### 2. Christ of culture

This is the other end of the spectrum. If the culture says it's a good thing then its good. We go by the social norm. Culture evaluates moral questions. If culture is OK with it then it's fine.

##### 3. Christ above culture.

This is associated with Thomas Aquinas. Being good as an artist, mechanic or doctor is not impacted by being a Christian. This is helpful in that you don't assume that because I'm a Christian then automatically that makes me a good mechanic. However, it can undermine how spiritual regeneration can impact life.

##### 4. Christ and culture paradox.

This is also known as the “Two-Kingdom Approach”. Martin Luther was known for this. This is where there is the radical distinction between culture and the Christian Life. In one's secular role cultural values are important whilst in one's sacred role, Kingdom values are important. This is only resolved in heaven. There is a constant struggle to balance life. It views the impact of sin strongly but may undermine the redemptive now outlook.

##### 5. Christ transforming culture.

This is the transformationist paradigm where there is good in all things in the created order but it won't be perfect now. We should see all of life as part of the Kingdom of God and being renewed and restored. Calvin was known for this. This emphasizes the power of the Gospel to transform society but may also be excessively optimistic at times.

The view you have affects what you believe is your mission. Some Christians will stay out of politics because of their paradigm whilst others will only pray for politicians to be saved, whilst others still will go the route of joining existing parties whilst some will start their own political parties untainted by the world. Some Christians will want booths at the Sexpo in order to show the world how things should be done biblically. Others might say, “why should we use the world’s evil platform or go anywhere near there?” Some Christian artists will perform any type of music in order to transform the industry whilst others will have a strong stance that we should only perform Gospel Music. Sadly they can sometimes be very judgmental if a song doesn’t have Jesus’ name in it. Look at the song by Whitney Houston below. It may not have the name of Jesus but it speaks of powerful kingdom values such as lifelong fidelity and covenant:

If tomorrow is judgment day  
And I'm standing on the front line  
And the Lord asks me what I did with my life  
I will say I spent it with you

If I wake up in World War III  
I see destruction and poverty  
And I feel like I want to go home  
It's okay if you're coming with me

'Cause your love is my love  
And my love is your love  
It would take an eternity to break us  
And the chains of Amistad couldn't hold us  
'Cause your love is my love  
And my love is your love  
It would take an eternity to break us  
And the chains of Amistad couldn't hold us

If I lose my fame and fortune (really don't matter)  
And I'm homeless on the street (on the street Lord)  
And I'm sleeping in Grand Central Station (okay)  
It's okay if you're sleeping with me

As the...

## V. What does the bible say about our relationship with the prevailing culture of the day?

We are called to influence and redeem the culture of the day

**John 17:14 -17** <sup>14</sup> *I have given them Your word and the world has hated them; for they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.* <sup>15</sup> *I am not asking that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one.* <sup>16</sup> *They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.* <sup>17</sup> *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*

**Matthew 5:13-16** <sup>13</sup> *You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.* <sup>14</sup> *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;* <sup>15</sup> *nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to*

all who are in the house. <sup>16</sup> "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

**Titus 2:6-8** <sup>6</sup> Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; <sup>7</sup> in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, <sup>8</sup> sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

**1 Pet 2:11-13** <sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from the desires of the flesh, which war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Conduct yourselves with such honour among the Gentiles that, though they slander you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us. <sup>13</sup> Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to the king as the supreme authority,...

**John 13:35** By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

**Ps 34:8** Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

**Micah 6:8** He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

## **VI. How did Paul demonstrate cultural agility?**

**1 Cor 9:19-22** <sup>19</sup> For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; <sup>21</sup> to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

**1 Cor 10:20-22** <sup>20</sup> No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God. And I do not want you to be participants with demons. <sup>21</sup> You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot partake in the table of the Lord and the table of demons too. <sup>22</sup> Are we trying to provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

**1 Cor 8:1-13** <sup>1</sup> Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. <sup>2</sup> If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; <sup>3</sup> but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup> 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? <sup>11</sup> For through your knowledge he

*who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.<sup>12</sup> And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.*