

Christ's Culture Or Just "Culture?"

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:2

Have you given much thought lately about the culture in which you live? I am not talking “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”, which is political ideology. I am talking about that which trains and refines your mind, emotions, manners and taste. The “culture” in which you live defines who you are, how you will respond and what you value.

Using Webster's New World Dictionary definition of culture as being: **“the training and refining of the mind, emotions, manners and taste”**, we have seen how the culture of Christ is different than the culture of the world. I believe there are actually three cultures at work in America, the natural, the national and Christ's.

Three Choices

If you have not received Christ as your personal Savior the only culture in which you can live is the natural culture. As a Christian, however, you have three cultures from which to choose. All three cultures have spiritual ramifications with the middle one being most abhorrent to Christ. **Revelation 3:14-16**

Natural Culture (Cold Spiritually)

Without intentionality of any kind you will live within the nature with which you were born, whether or not you have accepted Christ as Savior. That nature is self-serving, self-centered, self-pleasing, self-aggrandizing and at war with God (**Romans 8:5-8, 12-13; Galatians 5:16-17**). Specifically, Romans 8:7 tells us, **“the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so”** Your sinful nature, in this culture, dominates everything you do.

The natural culture is sometimes called the popular view. If you are living in this culture you just “go with the flow.” That which is popular, or appears to be popular as stated in the media, public opinion polls or friends with whom you run is fine with you. In this culture, **“the training and refining of [your] mind, emotions, manners and taste”** is highly impacted by public opinion and sensitive to what is “politically correct.” Any thoughts you have contrary to public opinion are often overcome with the rational that “you must be out of touch or uninformed”, anything popular must be right.

That which is right is measured by it's impact on you. Fairness is measured by whether or not it works to your advantage. Living in the natural culture is actually the lazy way to live. You don't need to put any effort or thought into major issues not directly effecting you. How the culture views abortion, genocide and world poverty are okay with you as long as it doesn't impact your lifestyle in any way. The fact that our nation has gone from condemning abortion, divorce, homosexuality, and adultery to embracing them in just a few short decades doesn't bother you if you live within the natural culture. The driving forces within this culture are your personal rights and freedoms.

If you live in the natural culture, your mind, emotions, manners and taste are more likely to be formed by a national commentator or opinion poll than by the issue itself or it's impact on the world. Living in this culture requires total flexibility. Nothing is absolute. Everything is open to debate and change, EVERYTHING. Patriotism may be positive today and abhorrent next week. If you live in the natural culture either opinion is fine.

American Christian Culture (Lukewarm Spiritually)

If you have received Christ as your personal Savior and Lord you have realized your sinful nature and need for a Savior. Acknowledging this need also brings with it an agreement that some absolutes exist, you are absolutely a sinner in need of a Savior. Living purely within the natural culture, therefore, becomes unacceptable.

The driving forces of the American Christian culture are social norms which “re-interpret” Scripture to fit the “reality” of the world today. The **“training and refining of [your] mind, emotions, manners and taste”** will be from a combination of modern public opinion and the Judeo-Christian ethic. As with the natural culture, public opinion still dominates the mind emotions, manners and taste of the American Christian. Biblical principle becomes a preference without becoming in any way foundational to how life is lived. The views of public commentators are often replaced by those of “church leaders.” Personally, little thought is given to the righteousness of a congregational or denominational position, as long as it doesn’t impact your lifestyle. If a congregational position interferes with your lifestyle you would change to a church which is willing to embrace your lifestyle.

If you are living in the American Christian culture you have a nice separation of things spiritual and things temporal. For example, church things are spiritual while work things are temporal. Tithing and offering may be spiritual but what you do with the rest of your money is temporal, as long as it isn’t used for “sinful” purposes such as drugs.

The American Christian culture requires almost as much flexibility as that of the natural culture. Change is not as abrupt, coming in smaller increments over greater periods of time. For example, those living in the natural culture accepted fornication, adultery and homosexuality as soon as it became politically acceptable to do so. Those with the American Christian culture, however, have taken longer to accept these changes, but eventually did. That which the natural culture approves will always be approved at a later date by the American Christian culture.

If you are living in the American Christian culture, the fact that our nation has gone from condemning abortion, divorce, homosexuality, and adultery to embracing them in just a few short decades, while perhaps a little confusing, doesn’t really bother you. The theological reasoning for condemning them in the first place escapes you. As long as “the church” accepts the change it is alright with you. The driving forces within this culture are your personal rights and freedoms with a touch of religion.

If you live in the American Christian culture, your mind, emotions, manners and taste are more likely to be formed through a dual filter of nationality, what is acceptable socially; and religion, what is accepted within your denomination, with an emphasis on nationality. Few things are absolute. Most things are open to debate but are viewed to be so complicated theologically that denominational decisions tend to rule.

If you are living in the American Christian culture you are not necessarily unspiritual, wicked or bad. You are living in a culture most generally accepted, and taught, in the American church. You probably have not been taught there even is a Culture of Christ, let alone how to live out His culture in a pagan society.

Denominations and congregations teaching the American Christian culture are out of focus and balance.

Christian American Culture **(Hot Spiritually)**

As the name implies, when you die to self and live in Christ He supercedes national and social issues. For that reason “Christian” would come before anything else in this culture. All **“the training and refining of [your] mind, emotions, manners and taste”** is accomplished by the indwelling Holy Spirit through the Word of God in relationship with all believers. ALL things are viewed through the filter of Truth as revealed through the Bible.

Biblical principles, which never change, are the foundation to your life. The “reality” of the world is put into perspective by the Truth from God as revealed through His Word and taught by His Holy Spirit. When you live in a Christian American culture you will not be threatened by changes around you or persecution against you for you realize that life is not about you but about Christ living in and through you. The pagan culture has no impact on you because you know and live by the unchanging Truth of Christ in you.

The fact that our nation, and many church denominations, have gone from condemning abortion, divorce, homosexuality, and adultery to embracing them in just a few short decades is seen for what it is, the natural man in rebellion against our Holy God. Abortion, divorce, homosexuality and adultery are non-issues to you because God has spoken so clearly on each in His Holy Word and He never changes.

The driving force within the Christian American culture is Christ crucified for your redemption, sanctification and His glorification.

If you live in the Christian American culture, your mind, emotions, manners and taste are formed by Biblical principle. Every Bible principle is absolute and not open to debate. The question on the lips of everyone in this culture is, "Where is it written?"

If you are in the Christian American culture you are the least flexible of people, which also makes you the most stable.

Personal Introspection

Which of the three cultures best describes your focus in the world? If you are living the Christian American life, you already know the conflicts which arise daily. Those conflicts will continue to get more harsh as the world sinks deeper into darkness.

Don't be surprised, however, if you find yourself identifying more with American Christians than Christian Americans. You would be among many Christians who have been led down the path of "doing" Christianity within the framework of the world instead of "being" a Christian, living out who you are in Christ. If you find yourself defining your Christianity in terms of doing rather than in relationship with Christ, let me encourage you to take another look at Jesus and who you are "in" Him.