

# COUNTERCULTURAL CHRISTIANITY

---

Nik Godshall, MA

TSC On Guard Series

Topics: Christ and Culture; Holiness

Key Texts: Genesis 4:18–24; 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1

---

## A. CULTURE IS A STORY

1. Culture is *the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes a community or social group*<sup>1</sup>
  - a. It is shaped by *worldview* (i.e. set of answers to 4 Fundamental Questions<sup>2</sup>)
    - i. Question of Origin - Where do I come from?
    - ii. Question of Meaning - Why am I here?
    - iii. Question of Morality - How am I supposed to live?
    - iv. Question of Destiny - What will happen to me when I die?
  - b. It is how communities orient themselves in relation to:
    - i. The world around them (e.g. natural resources, expression, etc.)
    - ii. The human condition (i.e. good vs. evil)
    - iii. Other people/cultures (e.g. friend vs. foe, social order)
2. Culture is a story told in Scripture: Creation, Fall, Redemption<sup>3</sup>
  - a. God established human culture in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15-17)
    - i. Humans were made God's authorized representatives in the earth
    - ii. Humans were to populate the earth through marriage and childrearing
    - iii. Humans were meant to culture the untamed world outside the garden<sup>4</sup>
  - b. Humanity initiated a cultural rebellion at the Fall (Gen. 3)
    - i. Rejected God's values and goals for Satan's lies
    - ii. Established new cultural values oriented toward self-preservation
    - iii. Rather than spreading life, we spread violence and death (Gen. 3:21; 4:8)
    - iv. Sin is humanity's fundamental flaw (Rom. 5:12)
  - c. Jesus's victory guarantees an incorruptible culture in the New Creation (Rev. 22:27)
    - i. The New Creation "arrived" with His coming (Jn. 11:25-26)
    - ii. The Church Age is the New Creation's advance (2 Cor. 5:17)

---

<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "culture," accessed July 8, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>.

<sup>2</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *The Logic of God: 52 Christian Essentials for the Heart and Mind*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Viewing culture as a biblical narrative was an idea inspired by the *New Dictionary of Theology*, which defined culture as "the activity ... of world-building, whereby the natural world is refashioned into one more fit for human habitation" (E. Y. Sung, "Culture," in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. Martin Davie et al. [London; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; InterVarsity Press, 2016], 238).

<sup>4</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, First Edition (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 51-56.

- iii. The return of Jesus will inaugurate the New Creation in fullness (Rev. 21:1-2)
- 3. Culture rises bearing the stain of human sin<sup>5</sup>
  - a. The sons of Lamech show the rise of human civilization (Gen. 4:21-22)
    - i. Jabal = shepherding
    - ii. Jubal = musicianship, the arts
    - iii. Tubal-cain = metallurgy
  - b. Lamech specifically shows the escalating corruption that accompanied the rise of “civilization” (Gen. 4:18-24)
    - i. He is the first polygamist and oppressive husband in Scripture (Gen. 4:19, 23-24)
    - ii. His poem coming after Tubal-cain indicates he used his son’s tools as weapons (Gen. 4:22ff)
    - iii. He is proud of his crime and presumptuously threatens any future attackers with God’s judgment (Gen. 4:24)
  - c. As human civilization advances, so does human corruption
    - i. Scientific discovery leads us to atheism instead of worship
    - ii. Technological advancement increases our destructive capability
    - iii. Forms of justice devolve into corruption (e.g. various fights for “equality”)
  - d. How much can Christians partake of their culture before they corrupt themselves?

## B. CHRISTIANS IN THE CULTURAL TIDE

- 1. Christians experience their earthen culture in two blended contexts:
  - a. CONGRUENCE: Little to no tension between a community’s cultural norms and biblical values
  - b. CONFLICT: Notable tension between a community’s cultural norms and biblical values
    - i. Many factors influence whether Christians enjoy congruence or endure conflict
    - ii. Christians are always called to defer to the Bible as God’s revelation of right and wrong
- 2. In conflict, Christians are a holy, countercultural Temple of God (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1)
  - a. As God’s Temple, we must not be “unequally yoked” (6:14)
    - i. This refers to living at peace with evil rather than resisting it
    - ii. It involves participation in evil to varying degrees
  - b. Paul uses contrasting relationships to highlight the compromise he wants to address (6:14-15)
    - i. Righteousness vs. lawlessness
    - ii. Light vs. darkness
    - iii. Christ vs. Satan
    - iv. Believer’s inheritance vs. unbeliever’s
    - v. MAIN CONFLICT: Temple of God vs. temple of idols

---

<sup>5</sup> K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 1-11:26](#), vol. 1A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 286.

- c. It seems many Corinthian Christians were still participating in pagan worship<sup>6</sup>
  - i. Pagan worship was not just acknowledging false gods, but inevitable sexual immorality
  - ii. Paul calls them to forsake their society's values and give all loyalty to Jesus
- 3. Paul repeatedly refers to the Church as God's Temple:
  - a. The Church must be held together in unity by love since it houses God's presence (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:11-22)
  - b. The Christian is called to sexual purity since they house God's presence (1 Cor. 6:12-20)
  - c. The Church is God's representative body in the earth since they house His presence (2 Cor. 6:16)
    - i. Temples housed the "presence" of the god they represented
    - ii. The Church houses the presence of the God she represents
    - iii. Pagans visited temples expecting to encounter the gods they worshiped
    - iv. What can unbelievers expect to encounter when they enter our churches?

### c. STANDING FIRM IN OUR WORLD

- 1. How separate do Christians need to be from their culture?
  - a. Paganism permeated social and economic life—it was *everywhere*<sup>7</sup>
    - i. Sporting events were in honor of particular gods and were viewed as pilgrimages<sup>8</sup>
    - ii. Most meat sold in the Agora had been sacrificed to an idol before going to market (1 Cor. 10:25)
    - iii. Certain crafts had lucrative unions that could only be joined by giving allegiance to a patron deity<sup>9</sup>
  - b. To reject paganism was to reject social and financial security
    - i. When does strong connection to a community make the Christian unholy?
    - ii. When does financial security become defiling for the Christian?
- 2. The Corinthians' question about groceries proves helpful to us (1 Cor. 8-10):
  - a. They were free to eat what was sold in the market (8:4-8; 10:25-26)
  - b. They were not permitted to feast in the idol temples (10:19-22)
    - i. Doing so was the equivalent of worshiping the idol
    - ii. Doing so would bring them in contact with demons
    - iii. Doing so would provoke God to jealousy (cf. Exod. 20:5; Deut. 4:23-24)

---

<sup>6</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 345-347.

<sup>7</sup> Cartwright, Mark. 2018. "Ancient Greek Religion." World History Encyclopedia. World History Foundation. March 13, 2018. [https://www.worldhistory.org/Greek\\_Religion/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Greek_Religion/).

<sup>8</sup> John M'Clintock and James Strong, "Sport," in *Cyclopædia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1880), 964; Tertullian, "The Shows, or De Spectaculis," in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 3, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 79; Jeremy R. Treat, "More than a Game: A Theology of Sport," *Themelios* 40, no. 3 (2015): 393.

<sup>9</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Second Edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2014), 379; *Ibid.*, 734.

3. Modern Christians must discern cultural equivalents to the “pagan temples” of Corinth
  - a. We must try to distinguish between *meat sold in the market* and *pagan temple feasts*
    - i. The former is a matter of conscience on which Christians are free to agree/disagree
    - ii. The latter brings us in some level of agreement with the powers of darkness
  - b. A *pagan temple* is any cultural artifact that exists to enable the indulgence of sinful desire
    - i. *Unsaved friends* don’t defile you, but *living like them* does (1 Cor. 10:27; 15:33)
    - ii. Being in *business* doesn’t defile you, but *greed* does (1 Tim. 6:10, 17)
    - iii. *Hearing profanity* doesn’t defile you, but *using it* does (Eph. 4:29; 5:4)
    - iv. *Your TV* may not defile you, but *your favorite shows* might (Psa. 101:2-3)
4. Christians are called to cultural holiness, which is motivated by two things:
  - a. God’s love for us (2 Cor. 6:16-18)
    - i. God calls us to holiness because *He wants* us to be near Him, saturated with His empowering presence
    - ii. God’s call to holiness is inherently relational (2 Cor. 6:18; He confronts us because He loves us)
  - b. God’s promises to us (2 Cor. 7:1)
    - i. God longs to fill us with His presence and power, so we can represent Him
    - ii. Sinners only encounter a holy God through a holy people
    - iii. Paul’s command to “cleanse ourselves” indicates that Spirit-empowered Christians can decide to do this

## D. CONCLUSIONS

1. Human culture will always be beautiful and ghastly
  - a. It will reflect the image of God that all humans bear
  - b. It will flaunt the stain of sin that all humans bear
2. Christians may participate in human culture because ... they’re human!
  - a. Not everything about human culture is evil
  - b. Christians rely on the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and their conscience for guidance
3. In cultural tension, Christians give allegiance to Jesus
  - a. As God’s Temple, we belong to a *higher culture*
  - b. God’s presence in us calls us to holiness, even if it means living a countercultural Christianity