

CHRIST AND CULTURE

When Jesus Christ was born into the world, he brought with Him the culture of heaven. At the age of twelve Jesus told his human family “I must be about my father’s business.” He was not talking about Joseph’s occupation as a carpenter. Jesus was talking about the business of his heavenly Father. When the time finally came for Jesus to give fulltime to his Father’s business, Jesus began to talk about the culture of heaven and how it was to be applied to the lives of human beings. He began to make statements such as, “the kingdom of heaven is like...”

When Jesus talked about the characteristics of the Kingdom of Heaven, he was describing the culture of heaven. Culture is a word that refers to everything that we experience in our lives while in this world. When a baby is born he or she is born into the world’s culture. Culture is like an onion; it is composed of many layers. The first layer of culture experienced by the newborn person is family. Mother, father, perhaps other siblings make up his immediate family. Another layer of culture is religion. If you are raised in a religious family then you will obviously be influenced to think and to act religiously according to the religious culture in which you were raised. There are many religious cultures in our world. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christian, and even the religion of atheism. Each religion is different from others in major ways. What religious culture do you have?

Here is the great mystery of [the Christian] religion: [Jesus] Christ came [from heaven into this world and was born] as a human [being]. The [Holy] Spirit proved that [Jesus] pleased God, (or Jesus put it: at least believe on me because of my works!) and he was seen by angels. (On at least two occasions angels came to encourage and strengthen Jesus). Jesus was preached as the Christ to Jews first, and then to the nations. People in this world put their faith in him, and [then] he was taken up to glory, [and eleven men saw Him leave the earth]. (You can read this summary in **1Timothy 3:16 (adapted from CEV.)**)

When a baby is born into this world he is also born into an ethnic culture. That is, the child may be born Italian, Irish, Jewish, Indian, African, Chinese, Caucasian, or some other. There will be a language that accompanies that ethnic culture. A common language tends to keep us huddled together with our ethnic group.

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When Jesus was born into the world the Greek language spanned many ethnic groups and many ethnic languages. This was because of the Greek conqueror, Alexander the Great. When Alexander went forth conquering the nations his army spread Greek culture and the Greek language over a wide variety of languages and cultures. Although Jesus was raised in the Hebrew culture, his religion is expressed in the New Testament of Jesus Christ, and that New Testament was first written in the Greek language. In the Greek language the religion of Jesus Christ spread over the entire Mediterranean world with all of its ethnic variety. Even today, Christianity is for the world. It is for every ethnic group. Jesus made certain of this by commanding his disciples to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that believes not shall be condemned.” (Mark 16:15, 16.)

The reason why the one who does not believe in Jesus shall be condemned is because his sins have already condemned him! And the only way out from under the penalty for sin is Jesus Christ’s sacrifice for our sins. This is why Peter could say to the Jewish priests of his day, “[the] salvation [is] in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12 ESV.) Our creator made us all, and He has created a single plan whereby all ethnic groups could be saved. Hindus are not saved in one way, and Islamists in another. The Chinese are not saved in one way, and Taiwanese in another. Americans are not saved in one way, and Russians in another. The One creator of the mankind has prepared one way of escape from the consequences of our sins. He has done this out of love. “God [has] so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” (John 3:16-21 ESV.)

Well, it is obvious that the faith in this passage is different than the faith that the devil has. The Bible says that “even the demons believe...and tremble!” (James

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2:19 ESV.) Will demons be saved by their faith? No! Many of you who are listening are lost in your sins. You may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But has that faith changed your life? Have you repented of your sins? Are you faithfully following Christ in your behavior? The demons do not trust Jesus to save them, nor do they obey Jesus Christ. Many of you may be like the demons in that respect.

Faith is obedience. Saving faith is obedient faith. In fact, this can be seen in this same chapter of John 3, down in verse 34 and following. "... he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for [*God*] gives the Spirit without measure [*to him*]. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." (John 3:34-36 ESV.) Did you hear that last sentence? "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; but whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life...." There it is. Saving faith is the opposite of disobedience! Saving faith in Jesus is equal to "obeying the son." To believe in Jesus as the Son of God is to follow Him. Have you obeyed Jesus? Are you still obeying Jesus?

Obedience to Jesus will bring you into conflict with the human cultures in the world. Jesus came teaching and practicing the culture of heaven. The culture of heaven often clashes with human traditions because human cultures have sprung up from sinful forebears. Our fathers were also sinners like us. In many instances, the traditions of our fathers are pleasant to keep. They are familiar to us. They fit well with the lifestyle that we grew up with. But the religion of Jesus Christ is at odds with worldly cultures. The traditions of men clash with the traditions from Heaven. An apostle of Jesus Christ put it this way, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions--is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2:15-17 ESV.)

In teaching the culture of heaven Jesus emphasized the fruit that would come from it. He called it "good" fruit. Jesus said "A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

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"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:18-23 ESV.)

From this text we see that people can preach in Jesus' name, cast out demons and do many mighty works in the name of Jesus, but still be lost. Why? Because they are working outside the law of Christ. They are "lawless" workers. In their daily living they are not working the will of God. The person who is practicing the culture of heaven is the one will hear the commendation, "Well done, enter into eternal life."

Friends, are you practicing the culture of heaven, or are you blending in with the sinful culture around you? As in all generations, we see this sinful culture today expressed in our dress, in our conversations, in our pleasures, and even tattooed into our bodies. What culture are you living? The culture of the world or the culture of heaven?