

CULTURE SHOCK

Series: What Does a Christian Look Like in the 21st Century? Pt1

March 1, 2020 ser3916

As you know, a couple of months ago Dez and I went to Atlanta, Georgia, for a music production session for her new album, which was the first time I had ever been to that state. I truly did love it down there, but it didn't take long for me to realize that this was a different cultural environment than what I was used to.

Now 'I'm not putting down the south in any way, I just found some things to be...a little strange.

For instance, we did our check-in at the front desk and I noticed this sign on the counter top. So I figured...Hey, it's the south right?

But then we got on the elevator to go to our room. When we entered the elevator we saw a man in there with a cat and a fully filled litter box sitting on the floor with all kinds of little brown bombs sticking out of the sand.

And the whole elevator just reeked of ammonia which, of course I, being the polite south Jersey man, I pretended not to notice.

Then we finally got into our room and we saw this ashtray...

That whole experience really piqued my curiosity on the subject of the differences in cultures.

You see...I had my first real taste of Culture Shock in a long time, and that was the inspiration for the title of today's sermon.

I realized from that point forward how important understanding culture is, especially for us as believers. There is a fundamental question we all should be asking:

What should a Christian look like in our modern culture?

- How should we act?
- How should we react?
- Should we dress a certain way?
- What type of people can we hang out with?
- Who should we avoid altogether?

But just defining what culture is, proves to be quite difficult. It's actually regarded as the 2nd hardest word to define. (The most difficult is commonly believed to be the word LOVE.)

In fact, here is a ridiculous definition of culture offered by Clifford Geertz, who is the single most influential cultural anthropologist in the United States.

“Culture denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.” Geertz, Clifford (1973). The Interpretation of Cultures. Basic Books, p. 89

Wow...that's crazy! But it's really no wonder that the word “culture” is so hard to put into simple terms, because culture encompasses so many things.

- It's not just a language... but what is spoken.
- It's not just the clothes that people in a culture wear, but **why** they wear them.
- It's not just the foods that are eaten, but sometimes the **way** foods are eaten.

And if you think about it... the people in a particular cultural environment don't look at their culture as anything unique. It just is.

Does anyone here ponder the fact that we live in a Western culture? Of course not.

Just like the Asian cultures don't sit back and marvel at the fact that they are an Asian culture.

Culture is only recognized as such from those who are looking from the outside.

Then we marvel at its uniqueness.

And I think the reason is this... Culture is more about a **feeling** rather than something **tangible**. And when you are a part of the culture, you're numb to that feeling.

That's why we want to travel to other countries to **experience** a culture. A photo just won't do because the culture is more than what my eyes can see. **Culture is the overall feel of a group of people. And when you're in a culture...you simply don't feel it anymore.**

Try looking at us, as believers, through the eyes of an unbelieving world. What do you think they see? What do they feel?

I believe they see a group of people with strong opinions about life and death and this guy named Jesus, but...who sort of live two lives.

Because on the one hand, we act as if we are our own little spiritual culture, and at the same time, we embrace the worldly culture around us.

And we do. We have our unique “Christian culture” way we do things, right?

Think about it...We lump together once a week at a church while the rest of the world is sleeping.

And when there, we try and dress in our “culturally acceptable” garb.

And then after church we all go out to eat. Before we can enjoy our meal, we have our little prayer ritual before we stuff our faces.

If we go out to eat during the week with our Christian friends...well then it has to be **Chick Fila** because... “They are closed on Sundays... and we like that”!!!

And of course we speak words that only we speak in our so called “Christian culture.” Like...

Hallelujah... (I don't even know how to spell **hallelujah**. Why am I using it in a sentence)?

An enthusiastic Christian is often said to be "**on fire for God!**" (Really? Doesn't that hurt)? I thought a non-Christian will be on fire. (It's called hell, people!)

Or my favorite... "**I had a mountain top experience!**" What is that supposed to mean?

The last time I had a mountain top experience was when I got suckered into going on a camping trip where there were no bathrooms, and I had to use leaves for toilet paper! That's not an experience I want to have again.

Here's another example of our so called "Christian culture." We all know that cursing is un-Christian. So, do we really stop cursing? Well... if you're like me, we don't "curse" in the real sense, right? Oh no... We only allow our **Christian curses.**

And we do have our Christian curse words don't we? I know I do.

And I'm not talking about the old fashioned version Christian curse words like Shucks! Dagnabbit! Jumpin' Jehoshaphat! and Gee willickers!.

No... now we've gotten bolder by getting as close to a curse as we can without actually cursing because you know..."We want to be culturally accepted without compromising our faith."

So, instead of taking the Lords name in vain, we skirt around it by replacing "Oh my God" with **OMG.** (As if turning it into an acronym no longer violates the 2nd commandment.)

How about if we get surprised by something, instead of

shouting out JESUS CHRIST, we just say the culturally accepted Christian version which is Cheese **and crackers**.

Then there's Fudge nuggets! (It usually takes them a minute to realize what you're saying.)

- Son of a biscuit!
- Shut the front door!
- Gosh darn it!
- I don't give a Donald Duck!

Now I know all of this is somewhat comical, but it makes a valid point.

We have our own acceptable norms within our Christian circles and these are rules that allow us to be both Christian and relevant. We simply try to have it both ways. We do all the things the worldly culture does, but we just put Jesus fish bumper stickers on our cars and wear our WWJD t-shirts and we're good to go!

That's the so called "Christian culture".

But here's the truth...

Christianity is the only culture that's not supposed to be a separate culture. Why?

Christianity should be the guiding direction **of** our cultures. It should be the **standard**.

To think of Christianity as a separate culture is like saying morality is a culture or that immorality is a culture.

No! Morality and immorality are found within a culture, but are not separate cultures.

What we are is.... **a community**. And there is a huge difference between culture and community.

Culture is defined by the characteristics of a group of people.

Community is defined by the connections between groups of people

To be honest, Culture is something that can be very dangerous. Why? Because to be in it, you must **become** it.

Think about it...The root word for culture (from the French) is cultivate. Which means to nurture someone up...or to help grow.

Now, we may think this is good for us, as Christians, because we want to grow, right?

But in a culture the growing is not personal. You're growing (or cultivated)... **to be more part of the culture itself. To be assimilated. To take on all the traditions and mannerisms and speech habits and social dynamics of that culture.**

And that's **exactly** what the world will do to us. This modern, "woke" inclusive, open minded culture with all its glitter and gilt is hell bent on turning us into them. (WHAT IS "WOKE" INCLUSIVE?)

And you can be Christian as long as you are a compromised, watered down, lukewarm Christian that looks, acts, speaks, thinks the way their culture does. And the overall tactic of the enemy is to make us numb to the world around us. Just like they are.

No...We are not a culture... we are a community of believers.

Do you know what the root word for community is? It is to **commune**. To become one.

We are becoming one in the name of Jesus Christ.

Think for a moment of how much our culture has influenced even the church...

Here's a pastor from the 1950s talking about how dangerous it is for Christians to listen to Elvis Presley music because he shook his hips.

And here we have a pastor today all covered in tattoos with his hipster beard.

What a difference 50 years can make.

That is what's surprisingly interesting. Slowly and steadily we start to embrace the culture around us until you can't tell us apart from the rest of the world. And we don't even realize it.

.
Example: Did anyone here even notice that the worship team played a Metallica song for our greet 2 weeks ago? No one. It has become so culturally acceptable, we've become numb to it all.

Now hear me out... it's not our tattoos or playing rock music in church that is the issue.

Obviously, I try and stay current in many areas of my Christian life as well.

But there must be a conscious line drawn. What did Paul say? "Everything is permissible for me, but not everything is profitable."

WE NEED TO KEEP OUR EYES OPEN OR WE ARE IN DANGER OF BEING SUCKED INTO A WORLD WHERE WE DON'T BELONG.

What I fear is that

We try so hard to be culturally relevant that we become spiritually irrelevant.

And that's always been the problem and paradox that Christians have had to face throughout the ages.

What does it look like to be in the world but not of it? How can we be a part of the cultures of our world without compromising what it means to be a Christian.

The answer...**we can't.**

No matter how hard we try in our jobs, in our schools, even here at the church to be culturally accepted, if we are **true to who we say we are in Christ...WE WILL NEVER BE ACCEPTED!**

John 17:13 *“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.*

20 *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. (That’s community)*

Do we see? We can never be a follower of Jesus Christ and also be culturally accepted.

The world against us.

Did you notice...We’re currently experiencing the intolerance of intolerance. Christians with “traditional” convictions and understandings of sexuality and marriage are seen as “bigots”—churches are being viewed as “hate groups.” Our beliefs are “hateful,” and our positions are “backward.”

(Talk about school teacher.)

So how do I present myself in the worldly culture?

We need to look no further than Jesus Christ. Jesus was always counter cultural in the sense that He didn't put cultural standards and traditions ahead of God’s kingdom. But.... He managed to fit in with His culture.

He dressed like his culture. (Unlike John the Baptist) He spoke like His culture. (Hebrew and Aramaic) In fact, He fit in with His culture so much so that those of His own people were shocked by Him.

Matthew 13:54 *Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. 55 "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? 56 Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" 57 And they took offense at him.*

You see...you can fit in all you want until the time where you stand out in righteous wisdom.

Jesus only stood out against His culture when Jesus of Nazareth became Jesus the Christ.

The problem with so many churches today and in turn those individuals who attend those churches is they see a decline in the numbers of those who go to church in America and abroad and the temptation is always to put the blame on something that is "un-cultural. "

They will say..."This is the problem with church. It's because what we say is offensive"

Then they will ask..." Why are so many turned off to the Bible and Jesus? Well because we don't accept everyone with love. We have to change what we say, change our focus, the way we sing, and the way we pray. Everything that is not offensive can stay, everything that offends must go.

And what happens? We blend in and we are no longer the light of the world...we are as dim as the rest of the world.

Let me remind those lukewarm churches...Jesus didn't go out of His way to fit in so as not to offend.

He was not fearful to offend people with truth. He put the will of the Father above all else. Even if it meant He went from being loved to being hated. Think of that. If we're loved...we want to stay there. I know I do.

I love that so many of you (the congregation) care for me, but I know it may not last. I know that I may say things that may hit a nerve. I know the enemy will pounce on those things.

It won't be hard for the enemy to label me as a hypocrite. I put a target on my back, because I am vocal with what I know is the truth and will risk it all to tell you the truth.

I will not allow myself to compromise for approval, even if it means that it could help the church.

This is why we are constantly encouraging you to take the 4 challenges, because they are designed to help us grow closer to the Lord and to each other.

Tithing, for instance, is a huge help for us to learn how to not bow to the will of a worldly culture. Why? "It's hard to take 10 percent of our income and give it back to the Lord. I mean, that's money I could spend on myself, on worldly things."

"I could have new clothes or go out and enjoy myself more."

All these things the world says are more important.

But God says to test Him on this. He promises that He will give back more than we can ever dream of.

Even more importantly, He gave us tithing to help strengthen our faith in Him by commanding something the worldly cultures say is foolish. And so, it strengthens our faith and commitment to Him.

So, if you haven't taken the challenge yet, I am encouraging you to take out one of the challenge cards in front of you and fill it out and place it in the offering container on your way out. You won't regret it!

We must stay mindful that we have to live in the world...but we cannot allow the world to live in us.

Jesus said he will spit us out if we live this way. But we don't need to.

Remember...just because we live in the world doesn't mean the world lives in us.

If we have the Holy Spirit living in us, then there is simply no room for anything else.

So how do we move on from here?

Well if we want to be part of a living community with Jesus Christ and with each other, then it needs to start with a true relationship with Him.