

The Importance of Internalizing God's Culture

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Our culture here in the United States is changing. Even if we cannot clearly articulate what the changes are, most of us that were born native to this country can at least emotionally feel the changes. For many of us who have grown up in the United States, the impact of the changes in how people think and the cultural shifts are a cause for deep concern and frustration. We feel we are losing the ability to live a life of freedom that has been the hallmark of our national existence. Our concept has been that we live in the "Land of the Free". Freedom has meant that we are not restrained by oppressive rules and regulations. Many of us are feeling violated by those who welcome and promote changes in our cultural norms. I want my perceived culture benefits, my expectations of freedom, I want my freedom of speech, freedom to express my opinion, freedom to pursue my dreams and to succeed or fail. I want the freedom to be wrong. If I fail and have the courage to get back and try again, I want the freedom to try again. I want my independence, my constitution, my bill of rights. I want the culture of freedom that I thought we all wanted as citizens of the United States of America. This world seems to be struggling with culture. Culture is what I want to discuss and explore today. I want to understand what culture is and why it is important.

The study of culture is part of a discipline called *anthropology*. According to [Sapiens Anthropology Magazine](#), anthropologists study everything about being human and that was according to [sapiens.org](#). In doing my research for this, I read an essay by Richard Eckersley titled, [Culture, Progress, and the Future; Can the West Survive it's Own Myths](#). It was published on August 28, 2022 on the website [salon.com](#). I will be relying on several quotes from his essay. In his essay he used to the word *culture* to mean:

"The knowledge people must possess to function adequately in society".

According to Eckersley, culture is a system of "meanings and symbols that shape how people see the world and their place in it". He goes on to say that culture gives meaning and order to our lives. He says that culture is "the language and accumulated knowledge, beliefs, assumptions, and values that are passed between individuals, groups, and generations.

Culture is very important to each of us. To individuals and humanity as a whole There are many nations and nationalities in the world and each has its own culture. Those cultures in many ways help define the people of those societies. The author cites anthropologist Ellen Corin as saying:

"Culture shapes every area of life, defines a worldview that gives meaning to experience and frames how people locate themselves in the world".

This concept is applicable from both a micro and a macro perspective. For example, on a micro level, when my wife and I got married, our individual cultural perspectives were deeply influenced by the culture of our parents. In addition, we had to develop our own personal perspectives that were slightly different from our parents. The result was that together we formed our own family culture which was similar to our parents, yet it was different. Some of the characteristics of what we developed happened spontaneously without any real thought. Other characteristics of what became our family culture was due to conscious decisions that we made. Some of the most important decisions were how we were going to conduct our relationship between ourselves and among others. We had to decide on what ethics and moral values we would base our relationship on. I don't think we realized at the time how important those decisions, concerning our family culture and cultural values would be to us and our children.

According to Eckersley, while other species have cultures in the form of learned behaviors, humans alone require a culture to give reason to live to make life worth living. To give us a sense of purpose, identity, and belonging—personally, socially, and spiritually and a framework of values to guide our actions. Moral values and ethics are the most important characteristics of our culture. The quality of values of society determines the quality of life experienced by the members of that society. Richard Eckersley says:

“Values are the foundation of social organizations and any discussion of personal wellbeing and social functioning must begin here”.

So, values are the most important. This is an important concept. Values are the determining factor and the foundation for the quality of life for any society.

We often hear the term *work ethic*. Individual families, tribes, or nations that have a strong work ethic will, under normal conditions, thrive. When the culture lacks a strong work ethic and does not plan and think ahead, that individual society will not prosper. These principles are also discussed and supported in the Bible. Turn over to Proverbs 10. The book of Proverbs is full of principles that can be studied and followed. By studying and implementing the principles in this one book, a culture can be improved to produce better results.

Proverbs 10:4 *Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.*
(NKJV)

In just this one verse are principles when understood can impact the quality of life and culture of an individual, a husband and wife, and a family. If a family implements these principles concerning work ethics, the family will normally see a better level of prosperity. Notice the next verse.

5) He who gathers crops in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son. (NKJV)

If the family practices and teaches a culture based on these two verses, odds are positive for great results and greater stability. Notice in verse 14.

14) The wise store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin. (NKJV)

Notice “*the wise*” is a plural word referring to “*people*”—the leaders, those that have stored up and teach knowledge and wisdom and produce a culture that is the opposite of destruction. Foolishness leads to destruction. Of course, even a culture with solid ethics will not always produce wise children. Sometimes it comes down to the individual. Let’s jump back up to verse 1.

1) The proverbs of Solomon: A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother. (NKJV)

The foolish choices of a son or daughter do cause grief or heartache. Even in this sad case, a family or nation with a positive culture will normally comprehend the folly and see the fruits of those who are departing from the positive aspects of their culture. Even though it causes grief, the wise can learn from the fruits of the foolish and desire to avoid foolishness. Notice verse 17.

17) He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray. (NKJV)

We are to be instructed by what we see and experience in this life. As we grow in experience and wisdom, we should be using that knowledge and wisdom to enhance our culture and instruct others. Unfortunately, as already noted, there will be those who will go astray. Even though there will be failures, we each have a responsibility to contribute to a positive manner to enhance our culture. Nurturing and teaching strong work ethics in a culture is important. A culture with strong moral values is also very important. Again, quoting Eckersley:

“A critical consequence of the trends in modern culture has been their effect on moral values”.

Moral values can be classified into two categories—either as *virtues* or *vices*. According to Eckersley, virtues are concerned with building and maintaining strong, harmonious, personal relationships and social attachments and the strength to endure adversity. That’s important. Strong, harmonious, personal relationships and social attachments are important. One thing we can expect in this life is that we will all likely face times of adversity. Strength to endure those times is a treasure. Continuing with Eckersley concerning vices:

“On the other hand, vices typically involve the unrestrained, satisfaction of individual wants and desires are the capitulation to human weakness.”

The fruit of vices is *discord, failure, and a lack of trust*. If you'll turn to Galatians 5, both categories of values and the result of pursuing either path are explained in the scriptures. In Galatians 5 both attributes of moral values are described. Virtues are described as a fruit of the Spirit. We are all familiar with these scriptures.

Galatians 5:22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23) gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (NKJV)*

These characteristics are a list of God's values. The fruit of the Spirit is God's goal for us. A culture with these characteristics does not need to be regulated with rules. These characteristics bring about freedom. A culture with these virtues, these fruits are what bring, what Eckersley describes as, "strong, harmonious, personal relationships and social attachments and the strength to endure adversity". These are the virtues that bring about no need for law. They are the point of the purpose of the law that says, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*". This is what Paul means when he says in verse 18, "*If you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law.*" Being led by the Spirit is to follow the same virtues that are the fruit of God's nature—His culture. Almighty God is not shackled with laws or oppressive rules or regulations that limit Him. God is offering a similar freedom to us. Our duty is to worship and serve God. Under that obligation, we are directed to serve others in love. Look back at verse 13.

13) For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh [In other words, not for your own satisfaction], but through love serve one another. (NKJV)

God has the liberty to do as He pleases. God's culture is righteousness. For us, God's culture must be learned. That is the reason for a life in this flesh. That is the reason for the law, so that we may be taught. When we learn and do what is acceptable to Him, within God's culture, we will be free and not be tangled with the yoke of bondage. Turn over to Psalms 17, a prayer of David.

Psalms 17:1 Hear a just cause, O LORD, Attend to my cry; Give ear to my prayer which is not from deceitful lips. (NKJV)

David is saying that when he prays, He is not telling God lies. He's not trying to deceive Him. Then he says that he knows God is watching. Just the fact that God is watching is proof that He is taking a personal interest in his prayers and that his prayers are true. God is listening.

*2) Let my vindication come from Your presence; Let Your eyes look on the things that are upright.
3) You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. (NKJV)*

That is personal self-control.

4) Concerning the works of men, By the word of Your lips, I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer.

5) Uphold my steps in Your paths, That my footsteps may not slip. (NKJV)

David welcomes that God is watching and evaluating him. God is measuring David's progress and testing him along the way. David acknowledges God's help as he learns the constraints that must be learned—those that are a part of God's culture. Constraints are a part of God's culture and are the constraints that we need to be learning. down to

Continuing in verse 15) ...

15) As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness. (NKJV)

So, David expects to be awake in the *likeness of God*. He described how God has directed his thoughts, words, and actions, to take on the way or the path of God. David rejected the path of the culture of vice. We also know the term *vice—the culture of vice*—is also a culture of lawlessness or sin. Turn over to 1 John 3:1. When a person exercises self-restraint, external forces of control are not needed. That's what we just saw with David. He was using his own self-restraint.

1 John 3:1 *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (NKJV)*

So the world does not understand God's culture.

2) Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

3) And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (NKJV)

A person who purifies himself is a person who exercises self-control and keeps himself within the confines of high moral values. For us that would be the high moral values of God and His culture. His culture is what He demands we learn and practice. Continuing in verse 9.

9) Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. (NKJV)

God does not sin because He wills Himself not to sin. If we have God's Holy Spirit within us, we are children of God. We have God's spiritual genetics through His spirit. In this physical life, our genetics have a profound influence on each of us. When we receive

the genetics of God's Holy Spirit, we are influenced by that Spirit. Our physical genetics are a type of the spiritual. Genetics is only one factor. In our physical families, the culture of that family also influences what the children of that family will become. The moral and ethical values of the family are foundational to the outcome of wellbeing, to be achieved by the members of that family. Each child will have to decide to pursue the virtues of positive moral values or slip into the lure of vice which, as Richard Eckersley wrote, "typically involves the unrestrained, satisfaction of individual wants and desires or the capitulation to human weaknesses". What choice each individual makes and chooses to internalize will dictate that person's automatic reaction to stresses and the challenges of life. Turn over to 1 Peter 1. We must take on God's culture or high moral values. The biblical term for culture, for God's culture or high moral values, is "righteousness".

1 Peter 1:22 *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart ... (NKJV)*

We are supposed to be doing what is required to purify our hearts—what we think and how we are.

23) ... having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever ... (NKJV)

I want to talk about this "born again" term in this particular scripture. *Born again* is not referencing the resurrection to Spirit. Rather, it is metaphorically speaking of being born into or taking on a new culture while here in the flesh. Instructions concerning the new culture are available to us. As we learn God's culture we must decide to take on and internalize that culture. We are learning the culture of our new family, God's family. Notice in verse 13 that this is talking about choices and the practices of our new cultural values. Verse 13.

13) Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; (NKJV)

We are being taught culture. We are being taught God's culture, which is revealed through Christ.

14) ... as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; (NKJV)

We are responsible for making the choices required to take on and internalize God's culture.

15) ... but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16) because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." (NKJV)

Our new culture is the way of holy and righteous character. Verse 6 and 7 lets us know that we can expect the process to be full of challenges.

6) *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,
7) that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ ... (NKJV)*

The trials in this flesh from the process of being born into or taking on God's culture are temporary. The values of God's culture that we take on will endure forever.

Continuing in verse 24)

24) *... because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away,
25) But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. (NKJV)*

Before we move on, I want to say more about this *born-again* phrase that I noted in verse 23. That the word translated *born again* is not referencing our spiritual birth at the resurrection. Usually it is, but this is not. The word is used metaphorically to represent our being *born into* or *taking on* a new culture in this life. The same word is also used in a different form in verse 3. In verse 3 the word is translated *begotten*. This word is only used in these two places. Just two places where that word is used in that form—those two forms actually. I believe the Strong's number is 313 and I believe your other *born* or *begotten* is going to be #1080 in Strong's. Both of them are in Peter.

3) *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ... (NKJV)*

Again, the word is being used as a metaphor. We are not conceived by Christ's resurrection; I think we all know that. Our spiritual conception can only come through God's Holy Spirit. Without Christ's resurrection, our taking on God's culture would be pointless for eternal life because we would still be under the penalty of death for our sins. As it says in Romans 5:10,

"We shall be saved by His life because He died and was resurrected, we are assured that we will also live".

As we saw in Psalms 17 and 1 John 3, we will take on the *likeness of God*. When we are like God, having taken on the culture of God, the rules of the law will not be necessary for us. I want to explain that a little bit because we do keep the law and we're not saying we aren't keeping the law. I want to be clear—I'm not sure I'm

communicating that—we do keep the law; we are required to keep the law. The point I'm trying to make is, if we keep the law, we internalize that law and it will be second nature to us. That's what we need to get to. The law needs to be second nature—we don't even think about the law, it's actually what we are going to do because that's our culture and who we are. That's the point here.

The point of the law is to guide us in proper thought and action. The law will not be required when we understand and practice the point of the law. We will automatically keep the cultural values of the law. The moral and ethical values of the law is how we will think and what we will do. It will be automatic. I think of an athlete, a soldier, or a hunter, who, when they move, it's automatic. They have trained their body and mind to act and perform a certain way. That's what we are supposed to be doing. That's our responsibility. God is helping us to do that—that is what we are supposed to be doing. That's why the law isn't going to apply because we won't have sin to measure, we already know it and it will be automatic for us.

The rules—if you'll turn to Galatians 3—and regulations of the law are meant to throttle back a society that is out of control and does not understand the destructiveness of vices or lawlessness of sins. We are all much better off if we exercise self control, practice righteousness and refuse to sin.

Galatians 3:24 *Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*

25) *But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor*

26) *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* (NKJV)

So, the law has been our tutor. The law no longer has the power to condemn us to death due to our sins. We still learn from the law. The sacrifice of Jesus the Christ has redeemed us from the condemnation of death that is required by the law. Our faith is demonstrated by what we do. Because we live God's cultural values, we will not break the law. Breaking the law will not be our nature. We will not be naturally breaking the law because we know the law and it's internalized. Turn to 1 Timothy 1. The law is still there, it is still our tutor but it no longer condemns us. God still retains the right to condemn us but the law does not. The law guides us in understanding virtue. We must choose virtue over vice.

1 Timothy 1:8 *But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, 9) knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, 10) for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine ...* (NKJV)

In this physical life we are not yet *born again*. We are not spirit and we must observe the principles of God's law. In this physical life, we do sin. Turn over to Galatians 5. The yoke of bondage is what is required for a person that violates the rules of God's nature.

Galatians 5:1 *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. (NKJV)*

Contrasting freedom and slavery. Vices are a form of bondage. Vices are destructive to society and to each of us personally. Vices bring on rules that stymie productivity and prosperity. Oppression and despotic rule followed by death and destruction are the eventual results. Skip down to verse 19. This is where we were earlier when we were talking about the two ways—virtues and vices. Now we will look at the vices.

*19) Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,
20) idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,
21) envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (NKJV)*

God's children will be the inheritors of God's Kingdom. If your personal culture and practices in this life are filled with vices, especially vices that you have not repented of, you will not receive the resurrection to eternal life. Vices erode the positive moral fabric of society and produce evil followed by destruction and death. Vices and lawlessness foster a downward spiral for any society. God will not allow that in His society. Turn to Romans 2. Once we have repented of our sins and received God's Holy Spirit, we stand in liberty from the punishment of eternal death. God then gives us time to learn and take on His values and culture. We are liberated but we must change. God will judge each of us according to what we become. Referring to what God will do in Romans 2:6.

Romans 2:6 [God] *who “will render to each one according to his deeds
7) eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;
8) but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath,
9) tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek;
10) but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
11) For there is no partiality with God. (NKJV)*

If we do good, we will be rewarded. If we rebel against God, there will also be a reward but it won't be a pleasant one.

Back to my question at the beginning. Why are we losing our freedoms? The reason is based on spiritual principles that can help us understand what is happening in our physical world. The principle is that declining internally held moral values and ethics bring on greater external pressures. So, the more we fail to have high moral standards

and ethics, the more somebody else has to come and force us. Now I have a better understanding for my frustration. I said at the beginning of this that I feel violated by those who are introducing oppressive rules and regulations. Our government seems to be moving toward unfair rules and regulations. They are becoming characteristic of our culture because they are the fruits of our changing values. What this country had early on was a predominant culture of positive ethics and virtuous moral values. When a society maintains high moral values and ethics that emphasized personal responsibility, freedom flourishes. When a society abandons personal commitment to high moral values and ethical standards, members of that society will lose their commitment to healthy social behavior. Eckersley says in his essay:

“Antisocial values weaken personal and social ties, which in turn reduce the hold of a moral code on individuals because it is those kinds of ties that give the code its leverage. They are the source of moral fiber”.

We have always had those in our society who sought vice over virtue but the predominance in our culture was a focus toward virtue and positive ethics. In the normal course of the nature of that culture, produced freedom. Anthropologist can understand spiritual principles by observing the realities of our human existence. A British and Irish statesman, economist, and philosopher who lived from January 1729 to July 1797 by the name of Edmund Burke famously stated—I really like this quote, it’s almost like poetry—

“Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters”.

To me that was an amazing comment and is a famous saying.

We can all understand the fundamentals of God’s plan because in part, God reveals them through our creation. God created a natural order that is designed to teach and lead us toward righteousness. As we consider our world today, we see the loss of freedoms that we consider are our inalienable rights. Our loss of freedom is the fruit of our changing culture. God has revealed the ways of righteousness using His laws as our guideposts. When we take on God’s culture, the fruit of His Spirit, our society will advance and prosper. As our society declines into a culture of vice and sin, we will be oppressed and eventually destroyed. It is our individual responsibility to take on God’s culture of righteousness. This is the important lesson for God’s children. We must internalize God’s cultural values.