

Lecture 5

Participating in Culture While Not Allowing It to Control Us

I. Not Allowing Culture to Control Us

A. Definition of Culture: All things that make up a people's way of life.

B. How do we know when culture is controlling us?

We are allowing culture to control us when any aspect of culture is placed ahead of God in our lives or when any aspect of culture reshapes the priorities in our life to be unbiblical.

Harold Abrahams: "I have ten lonely seconds to justify my existence."

Three ways that culture can change our priorities toward sports (C. J. Mahaney, *Don't Waste Your Sports*):

1. We have no higher purpose than winning.
2. We are more concerned about improving athletic skill than growing in godliness.
3. We use sports to glorify ourselves, rather than glorifying God through godly actions.

C. Biblical Set of Priorities

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

D. My Set of Priorities

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

E. How is it that we keep our priorities in order?

1. Sit under the ministry of God's word.
2. Develop a Biblical worldview.
3. Be a critical thinker.
4. Seek to fulfill your purpose.

II. Arenas of Involvement

A. The Arts

“There is an urgent need for more Christian thinkers who will dedicate their minds to Christ, not only as lecturers, but also as authors, journalists, dramatists and broadcasters, as television script-writers, producers and personalities, and as artists and actors who use a variety of art forms in which to communicate the gospel.”¹

1. Visual Arts

“A Christian should use these arts to the glory of God, not just as tracts, mind you, but as things of beauty to the praise of God. An art work can be a doxology in itself.”²

2. Literature/Writing

The difficulty we are up against is this. We can make people (often) attend to the Christian point of view for half an hour or so; but the moment they have gone away from our lecture or laid down our article, they are plunged back into a world where the opposite position is taken for granted. Every newspaper, film, novel and textbook undermines our work. As long as that situation exists, widespread success is simply impossible. We must attack the enemy’s line of communication. What we want is not more little books about Christianity, but more little books by Christians on other subjects—with their Christianity latent.³

Tim Downs: “Reaching the World Through Christian Fiction,” (Available at <http://familylifetoday.com/program/reaching-the-world-through-christian-fiction/>)

3. Film, T.V.

“We need great films... We have the makings of a movement that can change this culture. I honestly believe this. But I also believe the first step toward establishing the groundwork for a vibrant, relevant cultural movement based on scriptural thought is to stop producing ‘Christian films’ or ‘Christian music’ or ‘Christian art’ and simply have Christ-followers who create great art.”⁴

4. Music

¹ John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 23.

² Francis Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible*, 18.

³ C. S. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, 93.

⁴ Scott Nehring, “Why Are Christian Movies So Bad?”

<http://www.relevantmagazine.com/culture/film/features/23250-why-are-christian-movies-so-bad#mdCudvdA2FIyWtPK.99>, excerpted from Scott Nehring, *You Are What You See: Watching Movies Through a Christian Lens*.

B. Your Turf!

“... since God controls all that happens in his world, every meal, every pleasure, every possession, every bit of sun, every nights sleep, every moment of health and safety, everything else that sustains and enriches life, is a divine gift”⁵

Luther declared that a new Christian must withdraw from the world for a season, but upon reaching spiritual maturity must embrace the world as the theater of redemptive activity. His message was, “Away with the cowards who flee from the real world and cloak their cowardice with piety.”⁶

⁵ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 162.

⁶ R. C. Sproul, “Right Now Counts Forever: The Christian in the Marketplace,” *Tabletalk*.

Appendix

Living Wisely Within Our Culture

From Grant Horner, "Glorifying God in Literary and Artistic Culture," in, *Think Biblically: Recovering a Christian Worldview*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003), 319-20.

What we must consider when engaging various works with a biblical perspective:

1. *What is the apparent moral stance of the work in question?* Is good represented as good, and evil as evil? Are these categories blurred or even reversed? Is there a sense of justice involved at any level? Is man represented as good, evil, or neither?
2. *What is the apparent worldview of the author?* Is there a God in the universe whom the work represents, and what kind of God is He (or he/she/it)? Is the universe a place of free will or fatalistic determinism? Does good or evil win in the end? Is life meaningful or meaningless, random or purposeful? Is the universe a place that makes sense and is going somewhere, or not?
3. *What can be accepted-i.e., what is true?* What parts of this representation agree with the biblical revelation, and to what degree?
4. *What must be rejected as untrue?* What is against biblical revelation, and to what degree?
5. *Should one retreat from or participate in culture, and to what extent?* How can a person glorify God throughout his/her experience with this cultural artifact?

The rest of the questions are more directly personal and practical:

1. *Can participation in this cultural artifact be used for God's glory?* Is it possible and likely that participation (watching the movie, reading the book) will glorify God through obedience? Is it edifying?
2. *Will participation be detrimental to one's spiritual life?* Will this lead to a person's becoming desensitized to sin and the desperate plight of lost people? Will one buy into the worldly philosophies that may be presented positively or negatively?
3. *Is this a personal problem area?* Has the person had past struggles in any of these areas (e.g., the negative portrayal of an affair in a novel like *Madame Bovary*, or the positive depiction of materialistic atheism in a contemporary movie)? Could one find any of the material presented alluring or enticing in a sinful way? If so, should the person risk his/her mental purity, using his/her freedom in Christ as a rationalization? Is the person's conscience uncomfortable about participating in the activity?
4. *Has the person's obedience been compromised to a point that he/she doesn't recognize this as a problem area?* What is the person's motivation? Is there a wholehearted desire to glorify God by discerning obedience, or is the person being fooled into thinking that sin is not sin or that temptation is not temptation? Is there an understanding of a truly biblical anthropology?