

Christianity & Culture

Pastor James Harleman / Mars Hill Church 2008 Lecture

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What is culture?

“The sum total of ways of living developed by a group of human beings and handed on from generation to generation. Central to culture is language . . . one would have to group their visual and musical arts, their technologies, their law, and their social and political organization . . . a set of beliefs, experiences, and practices that seek to grasp and express the ultimate nature of things, that which gives shape and meaning to life, that which claims final loyalty. I am speaking, obviously, about religion. Religion—including the Christian religion—is thus part of culture.”
Leslie Newbigin

Why do we create culture?

God is our Creator and He made us creative to create culture (**Gen. 1:28**). The mandate to create culture still exists despite sin (**Gen. 9:7**).

Why does culture seem corrupted?

Culture is man’s expression of worship. When man suppresses the truth of God, he creates a cultural exchange. He *exchanges the truth of God for a lie*, which then permeates the culture created. **Romans 1:18-25**

- Each of us has the capacity to engage in idolatrous *cultural exchange*—due to our own sin—and support culture that glorifies idolatry.
- The gospel of Jesus Christ gives, and can restore, a Christian world view (via Scripture) enabling those who live for Jesus to engage in culture and faithfully discern what to

RECEIVE, REJECT, or REDEEM – from culture—for God’s glory.

Cultural Engagement: How to understand our culture and redefine entertainment

Acts 17- Paul’s engagement with culture at Athens:

- Knows the culture of his audience
- Exploits or uses culture for the sake of the gospel.
- Our mission- enter culture and use elements within culture to point to Jesus.

Christians Engaged in Culture:

- Steep ourselves in Scripture, so that we can know what to reject, receive, and redeem. The reason some Christians hide from culture is because their foundation is weak.
- Renew our commitment to engage culture and cease any intentional or unintentional disengagement.
- Admit and repent of areas where we have compromised the gospel and allowed culture to rule our time, treasure, and talents, with no connection to our mission.

Warning:

- The call to engage in culture is not to be an excuse to overindulge in an idolatrous culture—covering up sinful motives by saying you are simply “working for Jesus.”
- Engaging in culture should not be looked at as a gauntlet pressuring Christians who are admittedly weak in specific areas to throw themselves headlong against their toughest temptations.

Colossians 1:15-18- **“He (Jesus) is before all things, and in Him all things consist . . .”**