

# CULTURE

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(PART ONE)



The biblical translation used throughout this article is the King James Version (KJV) unless otherwise stated.

Mankind lives in fear; fear of death, fear of the unknown, fear of misery through poverty, fear of disappointment or failure, fear of physical or emotional pain, fear of loneliness, fear of shame and ridicule, and fear of rejection. Our fears are experienced through our interaction with the world. This article differentiates the culture of the world which induces fear, from God's culture originated in His commandments, statutes, and judgments which leads to peace and everlasting life.

*“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:17-18).*

### **Be Not Conformed To This World**

*“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto*

*God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).*

The Apostle Paul here speaks of being “*not conformed to this world*” but rather to be “*transformed by the renewing of your mind.*” The translation of transformed in this verse comes from a Greek word that is the origin of the English word metamorphosis which means to change into another form.

In contrast, the only other use of the word transformed in the New Testament is found in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, “*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.*” The Greek word translated transformed in this passage means to have the appearance of someone else, as in disguise, not changing, only masking.

Paul continues *“that ye may prove”* or more precisely, *recognize as genuine “what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”* Many messages and literary compositions have expounded on the transformative power of the Holy Ghost. However, I pray this article might begin to unmask the power of this world’s culture that we might truly heed the admonition of Paul not to conform to, not to embrace, the culture of this world and its empty rewards.

The word culture is derived from the word cultivate. Cultivate means preparing, developing and improving a process for acquiring quality through refinement and/or education. It typifies our walk.

For this writing, culture is defined as shared or common customs, beliefs, attitudes, values, goals, practices, behaviors, conventions, social norms, institutions, arts, achievements of a nation or people.

Paul speaks to not being conformed to this world, therefore the world must have a culture. Jesus speaks of the culture of the world being opposed to those that follow Him. *“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”* (John 15:19). Jesus prays to God His Father as recorded in John 17:14-16, *“not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”*

### God’s Culture

*“Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baalpeor: for all the men that followed Baalpeor, the LORD thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people”* (Deuteronomy 4:1-9).

In Deuteronomy, chapter 4, Moses implores the children of Israel to *“hearken”* *“unto the statutes and unto the judgments”* (culture) given by the Lord God *“to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you.”* Over the 40 years since being delivered from Egypt God had, through Moses, taught (cultivated) His people in His ways. *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD”* (Isaiah 55:8). These God-given statutes and judgments are foundational beliefs, values, practices, behaviors, arts, and institutions that the Lord God desired to have common with

the children of Israel. Their ways were to be His ways, their culture was to be His culture. They were not to add one word to His culture and they were not to subtract anything from it. Moses brings to their remembrance a time when *“Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor”* (Numbers 25:3-8) and reiterates the dire consequences of their adopting another culture and the faithfulness of their God to those who cleaved to the culture they had been taught.

God’s people, the children of Israel, had been taught (cultivated) in the Lord God’s statutes and judgments (culture) so that they would keep them and do them when they entered and possessed the Promised Land. God’s culture would be their wisdom and understanding *“in the sight of the nations.”* These nations would see and hear of this culture and say, *“Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”* God took great care to instruct (cultivate) His people in His culture. He gave them this culture so that when other nations looked upon them they would be viewed as peculiar, different from all other nations. As a peculiar people (Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 14:2, Deuteronomy 26:18, 1 Peter 2:9) and in the sight of other nations or people (Isaiah 2:2-3, Micah 4:1-2, Matthew 5:14-16).

Moses continues, *“For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law (culture), which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons.”* I pray that you see that this speaks of all God’s people, of which you and I are apart, not just the nation of Israel.

### Other Nations’ Cultures Are Not God’s Culture

*“When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so to do”* (Deuteronomy 18:9-14).

When the children of Israel would enter the Promised Land, they would engage with nations that were already resident there. Moses admonishes God’s people that *“thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations.”* The customs, beliefs, attitudes, values, goals, practices, behaviors, and institutions of these nations were *“not to be found among”* the children of Israel. They were to *“be perfect (complete, whole) with the LORD thy God.”* The cultures of these nations were cultivated by man’s thinking and were burdensome and

oppressive on their people. *“For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered (given, inflicted) thee so to do.”* God had no plan for His people to be burdened with the commandments (culture) of men.

### **Adherence To Man’s Culture Puts Men Into Bondage**

The following scripture speaks to the cultural bondage of how the strict traditional doctrine of washing had burdened the Jewish people to the point that condemnation and judgment were placed on those that did not adhere. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and scribes by showing their traditions, derived by the minds of men, act in direct opposition to the commandments (culture) of God.

*“Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied (see Isaiah 29:11-13) of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (culture contrived by men). For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban (devoted to God), that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye”* (Mark 7:1-13).

I feel the NIV translation portrays more clearly the hypocrisy of which Jesus speaks, *“For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and mother; and, Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death. But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God) - then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”*

The Pharisees and scribes religious acts, in this case protecting assets as Corban, were justified by their cultural traditions against the reality that those acts were, in fact, breaking God’s commandment (culture) to honour their father and mother. This was only one example of their traditions and the burden they

placed on the Jewish people that Jesus could have presented in His admonition of the Pharisees and scribes.

### **The Parable Of The Labourers**

*“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen”* (Matthew 20:1-16).

Jesus begins this parable as He began many others, *“For the kingdom of heaven is like”* meaning it is similar in character, in nature, or in culture. This parable speaks of God as *“an householder”* who *“early in the morning”* hired (called) labourers to work in His vineyard. He and they agreed together for a promised amount (promise), here specifically a penny (reward), and they went into His vineyard to work (to minister). The householder then went out in the *“third hour”* of the day and saw men *“standing idle in the marketplace.”* The marketplace speaks of the world of commerce. If someone was seeking employment, it would be logical that they be in the marketplace, but these labourers found no employment or calling there and were outcast and idle.

I would like to diverge for a few moments to another parable given by Jesus recorded in Luke 14:16-24. This parable speaks of a man (God) who has prepared *“a great supper”* and *“all things are now ready.”* He sends his Servant (Christ) to gather those that have been invited and they, one by one, offer excuses not to come. One states that he has *“bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it.”* Another needs to be excused because *“I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them.”* Both of these excuses speak to the culture of the marketplace. A third expected to be excused because *“I have married a wife, and therefore, I cannot come.”* This

expectation is based on the Jewish custom derived from Deuteronomy 24:5, *“When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken.”* When the servant told the master of the house of the excuses He was angered and ordered his servant to *“Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind”* (they that were sitting idle). These were those who did not fit into the mainstream culture. Referring again to John 15, Jesus spoke of the world rejecting them. They were not going to fit, because they were to be called by Him. They were not of the culture of the world. When the Servant completed this directive, He noted *“and yet there is room.”* Then the Lord said to His Servant, *“Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”* I pray that you can see the parallel to the parable of the labourers. It was those who were not immersed in the culture of the marketplace, but those on the outside of this culture, those *“standing idle,”* who ultimately partook of the supper.

Returning to the parable of the laborers, those called in the *“third hour”* were promised to be given *“whatsoever is right”* if they toiled in the vineyard. *“And they went their way.”* These labourers were not told specifically what their reward would be. This required a measure of faith, belief, and trust and they went obediently, believing, into the vineyard. The same scenario as the *“third hour”* played out again in *“the sixth and the ninth hour”* of the day with assumed similar results. Finally, in the *“eleventh hour,”* the householder goes out again. One thing that comes to mind is, why was the householder still looking for labourers at this late hour? The answer lies in Matthew 9:37-38 and Luke 10:2, *“the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.”* We are given a little more detail of the dialogue between the householder and these 11th-hour labourers. He asks the labourers, *“Why stand ye here all the day idle?”* to which they reply, *“Because no man hath hired us.”*

I would like to deviate once again. This time to the experience Philip had with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-39. This eunuch was *“of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship.”* He was reading from the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 53:6-8) which begins, *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way”* (their own culture) *when Philip approached and asked “Understandest thou what thou readest?”* (analogous to *“why stand ye here all day idle?”*) *“And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?”* (analogous to *“Because no man hath hired us.”*). Philip ministers to him of the one spoken of in Isaiah, Jesus Christ. The eunuch believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and is subsequently baptized in water and departs rejoicing. He was born again and no doubt began to minister *“in the vineyard”* walking in the knowledge of the promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Resuming the parable of the labourers, those hired in this eleventh hour were promised the same reward as those hired in the third, sixth and ninth hour (*“whatsoever is right”*). I would like to emphasize, we do not know the hour. Jesus had just finished his wilderness experience and John the Baptist had been put in prison. *“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 4:17). What hour was that? The third? The sixth? The eleventh? We do not know the hour! Repeating Deuteronomy 18:14, *“For these nations, which thou shalt possess, HEARKENED UNTO OBSERVERS OF TIMES.”* How many people are so consumed with the pursuit of when Jesus is coming again, that they forget about being laborers. God didn't burden us with being *“observers of times.”* He is teaching us to work in the vineyard (minister) until the end of the day. †

[To Be Continued In The September 2019 Issue]

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