

I. Week 7 - Culture, Intercultural Communication

- A. Historical snapshot, Adoniram Judson – To the Golden Shore, Courtney Alexander.
- B. John Piper also has a short biographical snapshot. [The text in italics is taken, in whole or in part, from Piper’s biographical snapshot.]
- i. *Born in 1788 in Massachusetts. Son of godly minister, the generation after Jonathan Edwards. Brilliant student. Went to university.*
 - ii. *What his godly parents didn’t know was that Adoniram was being lured away from the faith by a fellow student name Jacob Eames who was a Deist. By the time Judson was finished he had no Christian faith. He kept this concealed from his parents until his 20th birthday, August 9, 1808, when he broke their hearts with his announcement that he had no faith and that he intended to go to New York and learn to write for the theater—which he did six days later on a horse his father gave him as part of his inheritance. It didn’t prove to be the life of his dreams. He attached himself to some strolling players, and, as he said later, lived “a reckless, vagabond life, finding lodgings where he could, and bilking the landlord where he found opportunity.” The next night he stayed in a small village inn where he had never been before. The innkeeper apologized that his sleep might be interrupted because there was a man critically ill in the next room. Through the night he heard comings and goings and low voices and groans and gasps. It bothered him to think that the man next to him may not be prepared to die. He wondered about himself and had terrible thoughts of his own dying. He felt foolish because good deists weren’t supposed to have these struggles. When he was leaving in the morning he asked if the man next door was better. “He is dead,” said the innkeeper. On his way out he asked, “Do you know who he was?” “Oh yes. Young man from the college in Providence. Name was Eames, Jacob Eames.” Judson could hardly move. He stayed there for hours pondering the death of his deist friend. If his friend Eames were right, then this was a meaningless event. But Judson could not believe it: “That hell should open in that country inn and snatch Jacob Eames, his dearest friend and guide, from the next bed—this could not, simply could not, be pure coincidence.”*
 - iii. *His conversion was not immediate. But now it was sure. God was on his trail, like the apostle Paul in the Damascus road, and there was no escape. There were months of struggle. He entered Andover Seminary in October, 1808 and on December 2 made a solemn dedication of himself to God. The fire was burning for missions at Andover and at Williams College (the haystack prayer meeting had taken place in August of 1806, near Williams College, and two from there had come to Andover).*
 - iv. *On June 28, 1810 Judson and others presented themselves to the Congregationalists for missionary service in the East. He met Ann that same day and fell in love. After knowing Ann Hasseltine for one month he declared his intention to become a suitor, and wrote to her father the following letter: I have*

now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean, to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteous, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Savior from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?

- v. *Her father, amazingly, said she could make up her own mind. She wrote to her friend Lydia Kimball: I feel willing, and expect, if nothing in Providence prevents, to spend my days in this world in heathen lands. Yes, Lydia, I have about come to the determination to give up all my comforts and enjoyments here, sacrifice my affection to relatives and friends, and go where God, in his Providence, shall see fit to place me.*

I.

- vi. *They were married a year and a half later on February 5, 1812 and sailed for India 12 days later with two other couples and two single men divided among two ships in case one went down. After a time in India they chose to risk Rangoon and arrived there July 13, 1813. There began a life-long battle in the 108-degree heat with cholera, malaria, dysentery, and unknown miseries that would take two of Judson's wives and seven of his 13 children, and colleague after colleague in death.*

II.

- vii. *Judson labored to learn the language, translate the Bible, and do evangelism on the streets. Six years after they arrived, they baptized their first convert. The sowing was long and hard. The reaping even harder for years.*

III.

- viii. *In 1823 Adoniram and Ann moved from Rangoon to Ava, the capital, about 300 miles inland and further up the Irrawaddy River. It was risky to be that near the despotic emperor. In May of the next year the British fleet arrived in Rangoon and bombarded the harbor. All westerners were immediately viewed as spies, and Adoniram was dragged from his home and on June 8, 1824 and put in prison. His feet were fettered and at night a long horizontal bamboo pole was lowered and passed between the fettered legs and hoisted up till only the shoulder and heads of the prisoners rested on the ground. Ann was pregnant but walked the two miles daily to the palace to plead that Judson was not a spy and that they should have mercy. She got some relief for him so that he could come out into a court yard. But still the prisoners got vermin in their hair amid the rotting food and had to be shaved bald. Almost a year later they were suddenly moved to a more distant village prison, gaunt, with hollow eyes, dressed in rags, crippled from the torture. There the mosquitoes from the rice paddies almost drove them mad on their bloody feet. The daughter, Maria, had been born by*

now and Ann was almost as sick and thin as Adoniram, but still pursued him with her baby to take care of him as she could. Her milk dried up, and the jailer had mercy on them and actually let Judson take the baby each evening into the village and beg for women to nurse his baby. On November 4, 1825 Judson was suddenly released. The government needed him as a translator in negotiations with Britain. The long ordeal was over—17 months in prison and on the brink of death, with his wife sacrificing herself and her baby to care for him as she could. Ann's health was broken. Eleven months later she died (October 24, 1826). And six months later their daughter died (April 24, 1827).

- ix. *Now that his wife and daughter were gone, darkness began to settle over his soul. In July, three months after the death of his little girl, he got word that his father had died eight months earlier. The psychological effects of these losses were devastating. Self-doubt overtook his mind, and he wondered if he had become a missionary for ambition and fame, not humility and self-denying love. He dropped his Old Testament translation work, the love of his life, and retreated more and more from people and from "anything that might conceivably support pride or promote his pleasure." In October 1828 he built a hut in the jungle some distance from the Moulmein mission house and moved in on October 24, 1828, the second anniversary of Ann's death, to live in total isolation. He retreated for forty days alone further into the Tiger-infested jungle and wrote in one letter than he felt utter spiritual desolation. "God is to me the Great Unknown. I believe in him, but I find him not."*

IV.

- x. *His brother, Elnathan, died May 8, 1829 at the age of 35. Ironically, this proved the turning point of Judson's recovery, because he had reason to believe that the brother that he had left in unbelief 17 years earlier had died in faith. All through the year 1830 Adoniram was climbing out of his darkness.*

V.

- xi. *In 1831 there was a new spirit in the land. Judson wrote: The spirit of inquiry... is spreading everywhere, through the whole length and breadth of the land." [We have distributed] nearly 10,000 tracts, giving to none but those who ask. I presume there have been 6,000 applications at the house. Some come two or three months' journey, from the borders of Siam and China—'Sir, we hear that there is an eternal hell. We are afraid of it. Do give us a writing that will tell us how to escape it.' Others, from the frontiers of Kathay, 100 miles north of Ava—'Sir, we have seen a writing that tells about an eternal God. Are you the man that gives away such writings? If so, pray give us one, for we want to know the truth before we die.' Others, from the interior of the country, where the name of Jesus Christ is a little known—'Are you Jesus Christ's man? Give us a writing that tells us about Jesus Christ." But there had been an enormous price to pay between the first convert in 1819 and this outpouring of God's power in 1831.*

VI.

- xii. *Is that a coincidence? Or was that a God-ordained pattern for spiritual breakthrough in a dark and unreached place?*
- xiii. *He continued his work in Burma from 1831 until 1850.*

- xiv. *Married twice more. He had eight children with his second wife, Sarah.*
- xv. *She became very sick and they returned to the US for her care, but she died on the voyage.*
- xvi. *This time Adoniram does not descend into the depths as he. He has his children. But even more, his sufferings have disengaged him from hoping for too much in this world. He was learning how to hate his life in this world without bitterness or depression.*
- xvii. *He had one passion: to return and give his life for Burma.*
- xviii. *Adoniram married a third time in 1846 and returned to Burma.*
- xix. *He had four happy years of marriage and ministry in Burma, along with one child. But then the old sicknesses attacked Adoniram one last time. The only hope was to send the desperately ill Judson on a voyage. On April 3, 1850 they carried Adoniram onto the Aristide Marie bound for the Isle of France with one friend, Thomas Ranney, to care for him. In his misery he would be roused from time to time by terrible pain ending in vomiting. One of his last sentences was: "How few there are who... who die so hard!"*
- xx. *On Friday afternoon April 12, 1850, Adoniram Judson died at sea, away from all his family and Burmese Church. The coffin slid through the port into the night. The Aristide Marie sailed on toward the Isle of France. Ten days later Emily gave birth to their second child who died at birth. She learned four months later that her husband was dead. She returned to New England that next January and died of tuberculosis three years later at the age of 37.*
- xxi. *The Bible was done. The dictionary was done. Hundreds of converts were leading the church. And today there are close to about 3,700 congregations of Baptists in Myanmar who trace their origin to this man's labors of love.*
- xxii. Two main lessons for us to consider today:
 - 1. We should be challenged to consider the intensity of their devotion and passion to reach the people of Burma. They suffered greatly for the cause of Christ. This is how God often works – he uses the sufferings of his people to advance the gospel in difficult places. We should be sobered and challenged by this.
 - 2. But we should also take heart. They were human. They suffered sickness, depression, fear, death of loved ones. Yet, God worked through their suffering to accomplish great work for the kingdom. The point is not that we can do great things for God, but that God can do great things through us.

C. Main Point of Lesson

- i. Culture and intercultural communication.
- ii. Let's review the definition of missions that we've been using:
 1. Missions refers to the work of making disciples through preaching the gospel and establishing local churches, typically involving the crossing of cultural, linguistic, or ethnic barriers and performed by those specifically sent out by the church for this task.
- iii. Review issue of cultural barriers.

D. Image of God the Basis for Culture – Genesis 1-2

- i. Genesis 1:28. Cultural mandate.
- ii. Genesis 2:15 – work the garden and keep it.
- iii. Since we created in the image of God, we create, we rule, we keep, we worship, this is an inescapable reality, since we are created in the image of God.
- iv. This garden, growing language is helpful in thinking about culture. Let's consider the etymology – Latin colere, cultus – to grow or to till
- v. Agriculture – growing/tilling the earth; horticulture, viticulture, etc.
- vi. Growing / tilling human society – philosophy, science, medicine, industry, art,
- vii. Creation is what God makes. Culture is what we make, under God's sovereign rule and providence.
- viii. Concise definitions are difficult.
- ix. *The Lausanne Committee on World Evangelism defined culture as "an integrated system of beliefs, values, customs, and institutions which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity."*
- x. Shared beliefs, values, and patterns of behaviors of a group of peoples.
- xi. Culture is learned. Culture is dynamic, ever changing.
- xii. We all have a culture. It's inevitable.

- xiii. *So Henry Van Til says that “culture is simply the service of God in our lives; it is religion externalized.”¹ It is interesting that that Latin term colere I mentioned earlier, from which we get the word culture also refers to religious service, and comes into English as cult, cultic, and so on. Culture and cult go together.*
- xiv. **Culture is an inevitable reality for humans created in the image of God. It is “an integrated system of beliefs, values, customs, and institutions which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity.”**
- xv. **Missions Application – everyone in the world has a culture. Everyone in the world has a religion. This is part of what it means to be made in the image of God.**
- xvi. Every society has a culture and a religion. There is no culture sitting around waiting for us to bring them a religion. In non-Western cultures, law/religion/culture are like a three-stranded rope. It’s impossible to tell where the lines stop.

E. Culture After the Fall – Genesis 3

- i. Genesis 3 – Adam and Eve rose up against God in rebellion and chose to live their own way. As a result, we are told in Romans 5, sin and death passed on to all men.
- ii. But how does this impact the image of God in man? The Fall does not erase the image of God in man, but it does tarnish and degrade it.

VII.

- iii. *“Sin has not destroyed the creaturely relationship of man to his maker, who made him a cultural creature with the mandate to replenish and subdue the earth. Sin has not destroyed the cultural urge in man to rule, since man is an image-bearer of the Ruler of heaven and earth. Neither has sin destroyed the cosmos, which is man’s workshop. Culture then, is a must for God’s image bearers, but it will be either a demonstration of faith or apostasy, either a God-glorifying or a God-defying culture.”* Henry Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*

- iv. Genesis 3 tells us that we are fallen, so culture is a reflection of this, since culture is made by us. But we have not lost the image of God.

- v. Common grace – there is good in culture. We can and should embrace this.

VIII.

- vi. Man continues to exercise dominion, since we are still image-bearers.

¹ Henry Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959, 1972), 200.

- vii. It's not as simple as labelling a culture as all good or all bad. After the Fall, the cultures of the world are a mixture of good and evil.
- viii. *"Since man is a moral being, his culture cannot be a-moral. Because man is a religious being, his culture, too, must be religiously oriented."* Henry Van Til, The Calvinistic Concept of Culture
- ix. **Culture is an inevitable reality for humans created in the image of God.**
- IX. x. **Culture is a mixture of good and evil. Good because man is created in the image of God. Bad because man is depraved and fallen due to sin.**
- X. xi. **Missions Application – culture of a people will reflect their religious beliefs. If a society worships evil spirits, then a culture of fear will often pervade the society. If a society worships the true God, the worship will deeply influence the culture. We need to resist the tendency to label other cultures all good or as all evil. It's not as simple as that. Since culture is made by humans, it is a mixture of good and evil.**

F. Cultures Multiplied on the Earth

- i. Genesis 10 gives the genealogy of Noah and his sons, how they were dispersed by their nations across the earth.
- ii. 10:1-5 – genealogy for Japeth, the peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations.
- iii. 10:20 – repeated for Ham
- iv. 10:31 – repeated for Shem
- v. 10:32 – repeated for Noah
- vi. Genesis 11 shows the transition from one language and the same words (11:1) to the dispersion of people over the earth (11:9)
- vii. Since Genesis 10,11 – the earth has been filled with people of different cultures.
- viii. This is reality then. It's the reality today.
- ix. Some of you may have travelled extensively. Some of you may have never left California.
- x. Travel is fatal to prejudice – Mark Twain
- xi. The man who has never travelled thinks his mother is the best cook. – African proverb

- xii. **Culture is an inevitable reality for humans created in the image of God.**
- XI. xiii. **Culture is a mixture of good and evil. Good because man is created in the image of God. Bad because man is depraved and fallen due to sin.**
- XII. xiv. **The peoples of the earth are culturally diverse.**
- XIII.
 - 1. Verbal and non-verbal communication –
 - a. Gestures - Honduras
 - b. honking the horn – Iraq
 - 2. Food
 - a. Israel – sweet and salty foods
 - 3. Family relationships, education
 - 4. Men and women relationships – worship together?
 - 5. Anthropologist categories
 - a. Time / event orientation
 - b. Status / achievement focus
 - c. Task / person orientation
 - d. Vulnerability as a weakness or strength
 - e. Crisis / non-crisis orientation
 - f. Dichotomistic / holistic thinking

G. Culture and Redemption

- i. Old Testament Hope builds and points us to the Messiah.
- ii. Christ, in his coming, fulfills the promises made to Israel.
- iii. Matthew 28:18-20 –
 - 1. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. All nations – culturally diverse
 - 3. Teaching them – universal truths
- iv. From all the nations of the earth, Christ redeems a people for himself and calls them to create a new people.
- v. Ephesians 2:11-22 – A New Humanity
- vi. Christ forms a new people. Israel has 12 tribes. Christ calls to himself 12 apostles, and on that foundation builds his church, the new people of God. No longer would the people of God be formed around the nation of Israel. Instead, the people of God are formed around Jesus Christ.

XIV.

vii. You see what this means for culture? Christ is calling people from the various cultures of the world to himself and creating a new humanity.

viii. Let me quote John Frame, who delivered a series of lectures on Christ and Culture:

1. *The Gospel, you see, is not only a message for individuals, telling them how to avoid God's wrath. It is also a message about a Kingdom, a society, a new community, a new covenant, a new family, a new nation, a new way of life, and, therefore, a new culture. God calls us to build a city of God, a New Jerusalem.*

XV.

2. *Remember the cultural mandate. Sin does not abrogate it. God repeated it to Noah's family in Gen. 9:1-7. Nor does Jesus abrogate it. Indeed, he restates it for his church in the Great Commission, Matt. 28:19-20. Theologians have often debated how the Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission fit together. For now, just remember that both of these call for a renewed culture.*

XVI.

3. *Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

4. *You see how comprehensive that is? The Great Commission tells us not only to tell people the Gospel and get them baptized, but also to teach them to obey everything Jesus has commanded us. Everything. The Gospel creates new people, people radically committed to Christ in every area of their lives. People like these will change the world. They will fill and rule the earth to the glory of Jesus. They will plant churches, establish godly families, and will also plant godly hospitals, schools, arts, and sciences. That's what has happened, by God's grace. And that is what will continue to happen until Jesus comes.*

ix. The gospel of Jesus Christ transforms individuals and forms them into a new community, with a transformed culture.

XVII.

x. **Culture is an inevitable reality for humans created in the image of God.**

XVIII.

xi. **Culture is a mixture of good and evil. Good because man is created in the image of God. Bad because man is depraved and fallen due to sin.**

XIX.

xii. **The peoples of the earth are culturally diverse.**

XX.

- xiii. **Christ is creating a new people of God, people who are united to Him and transformed by His Spirit, whose life together will find expression in a renewed and transformed culture.**

XXI.

- xiv. **Disciples are sent to take this gospel to all the peoples of the world.**

XXII.

- xv. **But what about the cultural differences / boundaries?**

H. Missions Application – How to cross the cultural boundaries?

- i. Really one of two ways to answer this question.

- ii. Answer #1 – Cultural Imperialism, Cultural Homogeneity

XXIII.

- 1. What is the culture of Jesus and his disciples / apostles?

- 2. Acts 15

XXIV.

- 3. This is what the Jews in Jerusalem who trusted in Christ expected. People would keep the Jewish law and adhere to Jewish customs.

- 4. Incidentally, this is what Muslims expect of converts. They embrace cultural forms of 7th century Arab culture.

- 5. This is what we sometimes expect as well.

- 6. Ethnocentrism – the practice of judging, the values, languages, standards, characteristics, etc. of another culture against one's home culture. The other culture is usually seen as inferior. Missionaries need to recognize their own ethnocentric tendencies.

- 7. The ugly American is alive and well! The view that our culture is "normal" or "right". The grid by which we evaluate all other cultures.

- 8. We must be careful to distinguish between Christian values and American values.

- 9. Example #1 – American Christians try to arrive on time to their appointments. Is this a Christian value or an American value? If you're a missionary and you hold a Bible study, and everyone shows up 1-2 hours late, how do you respond?

XXV.

- 10. Is there a better way?

- iii. Answer #2 – Incarnational Model, Cultural Diversity

- 1. Incarnation of Christ

- a. Hebrews 2:14 – Jesus became like us in every way
 - b. Why did the Jews reject Jesus?
 - c. Did they reject him because he was culturally foreign?
 - d. God didn't send Jesus as a Roman.
 - e. John 20:21 – as the Father sent me, so I am sending you.
2. Example of Paul
- a. Acts 15 – we should not make the Gentiles keep the law of Moses and be circumcised.
 - b. Acts 16 – Paul circumcises Timothy because of the Jews!
 - c. Paul does not want to impose a burden on those to whom he is preaching. He accommodates himself and his team to minimize the cultural differences between them and those to whom they preach. He contextualizes his life and ministry.
 - d. I Cor. 9:19-23
 - e. Paul made himself a servant by adjusting his cultural preferences and practices in order to cross over the cultural boundaries that might otherwise prevent people from hearing the message.
 - f. This is the work of missionaries – to cross cultural boundaries, to learn a new language and a new culture.
 - g. For the sake of the gospel.
 - h. It's not about changing the gospel. It's about making sure the gospel is actually heard.
 - i. Not making it palatable but making it understandable.
3. Missionary Today
- a. Three Cultures in Play
 - i. Culture of the Bible
 - ii. Culture of the missionary
 - iii. Culture of the people to whom you are going.
 - b. Differentiation between universal truth and cultural form. Not always easy. Remember that religion and culture are bound together for many people in the world.
 - c. Posture in worship – kneeling, facing east?
 - d. Bible transcends culture and judges culture
 - i. Yet, we can make moral judgments about culture. William Carey. Abolition of sati.
 - ii. Syncretism – accepting non-biblical cultural practices and embracing them. Danger of pluralism.
 - iii. *“One cannot keep on evangelizing the world without interfering with the world's culture.”* Henry Van Til, CCC

- I. Conclusion
 - i. **Culture is an inevitable reality for humans created in the image of God. It is “an integrated system of beliefs, values, customs, and institutions which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity.”**
 - XXVI. ii. **Culture is a mixture of good and evil. Good because man is created in the image of God. Bad because man is depraved and fallen due to sin.**
 - XXVII. iii. **The peoples of the earth are culturally diverse.**
 - XXVIII. iv. **Christ is creating a new people of God, people who are united to Him and transformed by His Spirit, whose life together will find expression in a renewed and transformed culture.**
 - v. **Biblical truth is absolute and defines the essence of the gospel and the church. These truths cannot be compromised.**
 - vi. **There are various legitimate ways in which these same truths can be expressed and applied in different cultures. These expressions and applications must be consistent with principles of biblical interpretations.**
 - XXIX. vii. **The work of the missionary is to be like Christ and Paul, in serving the peoples of the world by crossing over the cultural boundaries (as much as possible) to make the gospel message understandable for those who are without Christ.**