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Mind Games Survival Course Manual



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Christianity and Culture

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II. Selected passages of Scripture can help us better understand our responsibilities within our culture.

A. *Genesis 1--2*

Within the scope of a broad definition of culture the first two chapters of Genesis provide a foundation for God's view of culture as contained in what is called the *cultural mandate*. This mandate is centered in the concepts of *creativity* and *stewardship*.

2. *Exodus 31--39*

Chapters 31--39 of Exodus provide a unique perspective of culture and God's involvement with it. On one hand the work of man was blessed through the artistry of Bezalel, Oholiab, and other skilled artisans as they cooperated to build the tabernacle. On the other hand, the work of man was cursed in the building of the golden calf during Moses' absence. This contrast serves to suggest that intent is one of the more important guidelines for judging culture.

3. *First Samuel 16:14--23*

David's skill as a musician (1 Sam. 16:14--23) demonstrates another way in which man's cultural expression is recognized in a positive light. A later chapter (18) shows that the same skill can be perceived in a negative light. The difference is in the audience, King Saul; not in the artistic expression, David's musicianship. The intent of Saul made the difference in how David's artistry was received.

4. *First Kings 5--8*

The building of the temple (1 Kings 5--8) exemplifies the extent to which man can glorify God through his culture. Just as in the tabernacle, the temple contained the consummate results of man's achievements in

dedication to God, and those results were not just utilitarian; they were resplendent with beauty.

5. *Daniel 1*

The first chapter of Daniel tells of four young men transported to a culture other than their own by a conquering nation, Babylonia. Their circumstances and reactions demonstrate several things.

1. Daniel and his friends did not try to separate themselves from the culture, including its educational system.
2. They learned from the culture, but they did so by practicing discernment.
3. God approved of their situation and even gave them what was needed to influence it.

6. *The World*

Much of New Testament literature (John's writings in particular) emphasizes the tension between the *world* and the Christian. An understanding of this term is a key element in the development of a theology of culture. The following points serve to summarize:

1. The world is hostile toward God; this includes man's rebellion.
2. This hostility is not intrinsic.
3. This world is also the object of God's redemptive love as exhibited in Christ's sacrifice.
4. The world is not to be seen as an end in itself. We are always to view culture in the light of eternity. We are also to do what we do within culture with the same light before us.
5. We are to be actively about the business of transforming the world.

7. *Paul's encounter with Athenian culture (Acts 17:16--34) is illustrative of the manner in which we can dialogue with contemporary culture.*

His interaction exhibits an ability to communicate with a diversity of the population (from those in the marketplace to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers) and an understanding of the culture, including its literature and art.

8. *First Corinthians 8--10, which addresses the idolatry of Corinth, provides insights concerning the place of culture and our consequent actions within it.*

3. Contemporary illustrations

Contemporary illustrations of the tension between Christianity and culture, as seen in the permeation of entertainment, highlight opportunities to practice discernment.

A. *Music, Television, and Movies*

Music, television, and movies are so much a part of the lives of contemporary Americans, Christians as well as non-Christians, that the subtle nature of their place and influence in our lives too often goes unnoticed. As a result, they provide the most obvious testing grounds for discernment.

2. *These illustrations also provide avenues through which the Christian can interact with culture and be a part of its redemption.*

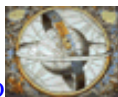
The most powerful conduits of cultural influence are usually without Christian influence; this must change. If not, we will continue to see the dominance of secularism and its attendant ideas.

3. *Going beyond these illustrations*

Beyond these illustrations, the Christian is challenged to utilize the process of discernment to the extent that all aspects of his life, as well as the culture around him, are affected.

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