

A Christian View of the World's Peoples

Gregory A. Smith

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Introduction

Anthropologists estimate that there are at least 1,500 distinct people groups in the world today. One source identifies 161 immigrant cultures present in the United States alone. Over 6,000 languages are spoken across the globe.

- What are we to make of these facts?
- What does the Scripture tell us about them?
- Does God have a plan for all these people groups?
- Is cultural diversity compatible with God's design for humanity?
- How should the church respond to the presence of multiple cultures around it?

Today we will survey three spiritual truths which will provide the foundation for a Christian view of the world's peoples.

Body

I. God Is the Sovereign Lord of All Cultures

A. Biblical Text

Acts 17.24-27

- 24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;
- 25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth [Present Active Participle] to all life, and breath, and all things;
- 26 And hath made of one blood all nations [*ethnos*] of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined [*horizo*] the times [*kairos*] before appointed, and the bounds [*horothesia*] of their habitation [*katoikia*];

ethnos: race, nation, people group

horizo: to limit, mark out, fix, appoint

kairos: a measure of time

horothesia: a setting of boundaries

katoikia: dwelling

27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after [*pselaphao*] him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

pselaphao: to handle, touch and feel

B. Exegesis & Application

1. God reigns as Lord over all he has created (Acts 17.24).
2. God sustains human life continually (Acts 17.25).
3. God exercises sovereign power over the world's people groups: They are bound in time (history) and space (geography) by his decree (Acts 17.26).
4. God has intervened in human history for the purpose of drawing men to "find him" (Acts 17.27).
5. We can see culture as the medium in which God has chosen to contrast sin and redemption; in culture sin looms darkest and righteousness appears brightest.
6. God, as the Lord of culture, is at work in the diverse world we see today. While we cannot view God as the Creator of sinful social practices, we know that he is sovereignly working to bring himself glory through man's culture.

II. God Is the Impartial Judge of All Cultures

A. Biblical Texts

Acts 10.34-35

34 Then Peter opened [his] mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons [*prosopoleptes*]:

prosopoleptes: one who discriminates

35 But in every nation [ethnos] he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

ethnos: race, nation, people group

Rom 2.1-16, esp. vv 6, 9-11

6 [God] will render [*apodidomi*] to every man according to his deeds:

apodidomi: to pay off, discharge what is due

- 9 Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;
- 10 But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:
- 11 For there is no respect of persons [*prosopolepsia*] with God.

prosopolepsia: partiality

B. Exegesis & Application

1. God favors no person or people group (Acts 10.34; Rom 2.11). In every culture men and women are judged impartially based on their knowledge of and service to God (Acts 10.35; Rom 2.6).
2. All who follow God's design for human righteousness are accepted by him (Acts 10.35; Rom 2.10).
3. All who reject God's plan for human righteousness are condemned by him (Rom 2.9).
4. Just as God does not discriminate on the basis of ethnic background, neither should we. Neither should we judge on any other social basis, as James 2.1-4 makes clear.
5. American culture is not God's culture. Neither is any other culture his, for God does not have a culture. Rather, culture is a human phenomenon, the product of our creation in the image of God and the marring of that image by sin. God judges all cultures according to an impartial standard.

III. God Is the Gracious Redeemer of All Cultures

A. Biblical Text

Rev 5.9-10

- 9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred [*phule*], and tongue [*glossa*], and people [*laos*], and nation [*ethnos*];

phule: tribe, race, nation, people

glossa: language

laos: people, tribe, nation

ethnos: race, nation, people group

- 10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

B. Exegesis & Application

1. The inhabitants of heaven will represent every people group imaginable—every tribe, every language, every people, every nation (Rev 2.9).
2. We should endeavor to win men and women of every people group to faith in Jesus Christ.
3. We should recognize that social strategies will never achieve unity in this culturally diverse world. However, because spiritual realities are greater than cultural realities, the body of Christ can unite the widest diversity of human beings bought by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

“Although we refer to Christianity as biblical Christianity, we must realize that it is never found apart from a culture; it is always a part of a culture. The Christianity of the New Testament was a part of the culture of the Greco-Roman world of the first century. Today we find American Christianity, Colombian Christianity, and Nigerian Christianity. There is no such thing as plain Christianity. Christianity always expresses itself through a culture. It is unique in that it can be expressed equally well in any culture. It is the one religion that can meet people’s needs in any society” (Grunlan & Mayers, 1988, p. 230).

Cultural diversity is a reality which God appears to have designed for the world. Yet we must realize that God is not a prisoner of our own culture. His hand governs all cultures; his laws apply to all cultures; his love extends to all cultures. In eternity, representatives of all the world’s people groups will stand in unity before God to worship him.

Work Cited

Grunlan, Stephen A., & Mayers, Marvin K. (1988). *Cultural anthropology: A Christian perspective* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books.