

# The Christian Man

## Session 9: Culture: The Role of a Christian Man in Our Current Culture

Edited Transcript

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Good morning, men. Please turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 10 verse 25. We'll begin this morning with a shout out to a new group, Recharge ministry for men. It's led by and, Chris, I'm going to apologize. I don't know how to pronounce your last name. It could be Corseaux like the French pronunciation or Corsaut. I apologize for that. I just don't know. Schaumburg, Illinois. Six men. They meet on Sundays at 8:00 AM. I think they meet for a couple of hours. "We are a community of men developing the encouragement, involvement, and building of human trust through the gospel of Jesus Christ for the purpose of God's kingdom." What a great mission statement. Wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm, rousing Man in the Mirror Welcome to Recharge. One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, men. We are really honored and happy to have you with us.

Our series is The Christian Man. Today, we're going to be talking about culture, the role of a Christian man in our current culture. I've personally always been fascinated by the possibility of influencing our culture for the gospel of Jesus Christ and Christ himself. When I was in my first small group, first year I was a Christian guy in a small group, six of us, and we met at the IHOP, still have IHOP or IHOB. Now back to IHOP. It was over on East Colonial Drive. I remember I was so excited. I invited all the guys in our group to breakfast. I had been thinking about the possibility of influencing the Orlando community culture for Christ and his gospel. I had developed this chart. I had thought through. I said, "You know, beyond your family, you have five arenas where you can have an impact for Jesus." I'm not saying these are the right five, but this is what I came up with: church, business, civic affairs, education, and politics.

I said, "Guys, why don't we each take one of these areas and then we, as a group and we'll stay together as a group, but then we'll go out and we'll have an influence in the culture?" I drew up little pods with little lines and then how we'd all have different influences and so forth. I ended up saying that, since I didn't have kids at the time and because I tend to be apolitical. I mean, nobody's completely apolitical, but it's just not the thing that really gets me jacked up. I said, "Since I don't have kids and I'm apolitical, I'll do civic affairs. I'll do something in civic affairs. We're all going to be involved in our church. We're all going to be involved in our business, so let's each pick one of these other three areas. I'll do civic affairs." I said, "What do I do?"

I ended up, my business office was located about two blocks from here, and the Winter Park Chamber of Commerce was located about one block over that way, maybe two. I said, "I'll join the Winter Park Chamber of Commerce," so I did. I went to a couple of meetings. Then I said, "Is there anything you have around here that I could do to help?" They said, "Yeah, we need somebody on the program committee." I said, "Okay, I'll do that." They put me on the program committee. After about two meetings, the

program committee chairman resigned. They said, "Hey, would you like to be the program committee chairman?" I said okay. Then I'm doing that for about a year. Then, you know, all the enthusiasm of that meeting in IHOP was starting to wane after a year. I said, "Now, Lord, could you kind of rehearse with me exactly what it is that I'm supposed to be doing here?"

Then, one day, God put the idea into my mind, "Why don't you see if the Winter Park Chamber program committee would like to put on a prayer breakfast on the Thursday before Thanksgiving? You can call it the Thanksgiving Leadership Prayer Breakfast." I said, "Okay, we'll give it a try." We did that. The first time that we had it, we had like 175 people there and 75 of them prayed to receive Jesus. Oh my goodness. It was crazy. We did that for 40 years. Many of you have been involved in that in different ways. Thousands of people came to Christ. Lots of impact on the community and culture came out of that, but it came out of a desire that I've always had, a fascination I've always had to see how Christ might be able to impact culture. I'm excited today that we get to talk about the role of a Christian man in our current culture.

## **CHRIST IN CULTURE**

First up, let's just talk about Christ in culture. I picked that name for the first circle from the title of a book by Richard Niebuhr, one of the great minds of all time. Christ in Culture is his book. It is a tour de force because he examines the theologies of culture of everybody that's ever had one, whether it's from Tolstoy to Luther to Augustine to Luther. Did I say Luther? Everybody. He really has done a great job there. If you're looking for a book on what you should know, that would be the book, but we're not going to talk about what you should know about culture. We all know that the situation, that there is a lot of division on cultural issues, not that that's new, but it does seem like somebody's turned up the dial on the stove a little bit. We have racial tensions running as high as I can remember in my lifetime. You have gender issues and a lot of rhetoric on that. I'm going to really resist the idea to go into these. I just want to sort of get them on your radar. Marriage, what is a marriage? Violence, immigration, social media, bullying, 60 million abortions. If you believe that a fetus is a human life, then that means that our population has been reduced by 60 million people minus infant mortality, minus other infant mortality. Politics.

You know, there have always been culture issues. Like when I was coming up, it was like you have to go home because you're not wearing socks with your sandals. Those are the cultural issues that I remember that were really important when I was coming up. These are monumental and they're extremely important. I think it's foolish just to dismiss them and the people that have other views just because we're not maybe into it. On the other hand, there are a lot of cultural things going on that are so incredibly positive. Would anybody like to go back to not being able to bank online, for example, or not be able to pull out a smartphone and Google a particular fact or look at a product review? My wife and I were just talking about this last night. I bought some braces to put on my wrists when I was typing. I was able to look at all these product reviews on like 2,000 products and so forth. You know, before Google, what would you have done? Before Amazon, what would you have done? You'd have gone down to the drugstore and you'd bought whatever one product was on the rack.

There are a lot of things that are really tremendous, but the reason that we have, this is my opinion, excuse me, is that orthodoxy is under attack because the moral authority of Jesus Christ is under attack. Orthodoxy is under attack because the moral authority of Jesus Christ is under attack. Have you ever heard the term antinomian, against law? There's a lot of antinomianism in the church, forgetting outside the church, in our particular day. That's the situation. I'm not going to be trying to offer solutions for any

of those issues, but I would like to offer you a framework for you to be able to understand your role, for each of us to be able to understand our role as a Christian man in the current culture and do a little vision casting too for what you might be able to do to make a difference. The problem is multifaceted. That's the situation.

What's the problem? If any of these issues could be resolved, they would have been resolved by now. There must be something else going on, something else that God wants to do. God is sovereign. He's not up in heaven wringing his hands about all of these issues. He wasn't caught off guard by any of these issues. He didn't say, "Oops, didn't see that one coming." He knows what's going on. He has sent us to build his kingdom but also to tend his culture, to take care of his creation. There is so many different ways, so many different opinions about how to do that, but what we're going to do instead is we're going to look at the example of Jesus. We're going to look at the example of Jesus. You might be wondering, "What can one man do?" Be thinking about what can one man do as we go through this.

Jesus helps us to understand a very important idea, that Christianity is lived inside cultures. Jesus did not come to install a new Christian culture. We are not called upon to install a new Christian culture. It is not our assignment to create a Christian culture. It is our assignment to live as Christians and build his kingdom as we take care of the culture, which is the cultural mandate. We get a lot of clues for this from Jesus. How did Jesus think about culture? How did Jesus think about culture? Luke chapter 10 verse 25 and following is the parable of the good Samaritan. An attorney asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asked the lawyer, "What do you think? How do you read it?" He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." Then Jesus said, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live," but he wanted to justify himself, that is the attorney did. He asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Then, Jesus gives this parable of the man who goes on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho and was robbed and beaten and left in a ditch. A priest came by, didn't help the Levite, came by, didn't help. Then, a Samaritan, a business man, apparently, came by and did help and took him to a place, like a Holiday Inn, and then paid for the innkeeper to take care of him and said that he'd be back and reimburse him for any additional expenses. Then, Jesus, in verse 36, says, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" Now, remember, this man is asked the question, just said love God and love your neighbor. That's what you need to do inherit eternal life. Then Jesus says, "Which of these three men do you think is doing that?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."

When we look at Jesus and we look at culture, we see that the foundational principle, the most powerful force in culture from Jesus is love. We've said here before love God and do what you want. The foundation for all of these cultural issues, which fall in what is called the adiaphora, some of you may have remembered I've said this before. That's a Latin term, adiaphora, A-D-I-A-P-H-O-R-A. Adiaphora means the gray. There are some things in the Bible that are specifically commanded. Jesus commanded lots of things and we're supposed to do those. Then, there are a lot of things in the Bible that are specifically prohibited. There are things to do that are clear in the Bible and there are things that are not to do that are clear in the Bible. Do not prohibit what God allows and do not allow what God prohibits, for another talk someday. Not a bad way of thinking about it.

However, do you spank your children? How do you discipline your children? There's so many issues that fall into the adiaphora. Most of these cultural issues do. That's why you have people of ... While there are people of ill intent on both sides of these issues, by and large, all the people that are involved in

these issues, they really believe what they believe. The problem is not what the nonreligious people and the religious people, how they differ. Where the real problem for us is that within the body of Christ, there are tremendous differences on these culture issues. Jesus gives us this law of love. Put on that law of love and let that be the foundation for how we interact on all these things.

I put a whole bunch of verses there and I'm going to encourage you. You can look at them, any of them that you want to, but in Matthew 12:9 and following, Jesus is healing on the Sabbath. Because he's done a good thing, there are people that they decide they want to kill him because he's done a good thing on the Sabbath, but he did it anyway. He went ahead and he did it anyway. In Matthew nine verse nine and following, Jesus is having dinner, I think it's at Matthew's house, and they're asking, "Why does your teacher have dinner with sinners and tax collectors?" Jesus says, "This is why I came. I came not to call the righteous but to call sinners to repentance." He hangs out with all kinds of people in culture.

I was reading, some of you know I'm reading through the gospels once a month. I've been reading through Matthew over this last week or so. It's interesting, almost every story in the Bible is about culture. Almost every story in the Bible is about culture. Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's." Jesus told a parable about wheat being sown and then weeds showing up. The servants said to the master, "What do you want us to do? Do you want us to pull up the weeds?" He said, "No, no, no. Let the weeds be. Let the weeds and the wheat grow together and then, at the harvest, we'll separate them out." God has actually ordained it so that the weeds and the wheat are growing together so you're going to have these cultural conflicts. Speaking of weeds, I'm starting to get into the weeds on this talk. Oh my gosh.

All right. Here we are. There are four stances that you can take in your role as a Christian man in our current culture when you look at any of these verses about Jesus. The first stance is that you can embrace the culture. You can make an accommodation to the culture. This is what the cultural Christian does, tries to figure out how to make the gender blender people happy and the people who are calling you a bigot because you have a binary idea about what manhood and womanhood is. You know, binary, you're either a man or you're a woman. There are people that actually believe that still, but in this transgender world where, according to John Davison Hunter, who wrote the book and coined the term Culture Wars, the culture generating mechanisms are all in the hands of the liberal progressives. You're really now a bigot if you believe in a binary man-woman kind of a concept.

Then, the first stance is to try to embrace that and to try to figure out how we can negotiate terms. The second is to overthrow it, overthrow the culture. You've seen some attempts at that down through the years, but what did Jesus say? He says, "Did I come to start a rebellion?" He said, "If I wanted to, I could call on my Father and he would send legions of angels to set me free. Put your sword away." You have embracing. You have overthrowing. Then, you have withdrawing from the culture. You look at some of these texts where Jesus, he just goes right into the temple. I mean, he just goes right into the temple and turns over the tables. I mean, he gets right down in it, but there are people who feel like the answer's to withdraw.

I don't know the Mennonites are wrong, but if you look at the Mennonites, when you see how culture's passed them by in many ways, although I have heard that some of these guys have Corvettes parked in the barn out back that they don't let anybody see except ... The idea of withdrawing from culture, not engaging in a lot of the technological advances and so forth. Then, the fourth stance. We have embrace, overthrow, withdraw, and then the one that we see Jesus employing is engaging the culture. Then, in John 17, Jesus, in his high priestly prayer, he says, "Father, I'm coming to you, but I'm leaving them in

the world. They are not of the world." This is where we get this concept of being in but not of the world. Then he says, "As you have sent me, so I am sending them." We're in but not of, but we've also been sent into the world to engage the world. Jesus knew exactly what he's doing in Matthew 10:16. He says, "I'm sending you out as sheep among wolves." He knew what he was doing, but he sent you, he sent me to engage the culture.

This is the sorriest talk I've given in a long time. I just don't like this at all. Okay, which one was the sorriest then? We have these four different approaches and we have the example of Jesus. **The Big Idea today is this. "What does loyalty to Jesus Christ look like?"** When you're in a conversation at the gym with somebody about gay rights or football for that matter, what does loyalty to Jesus Christ look like? This is the question that the person who wants to be engaged asks. I love this question for this reason. It doesn't tell you how to think because it is the adiaphora and you can see if you were to read this book, Christ in Culture, you would see that the greatest Christian minds of all history don't agree on issues of culture. They don't. There's no Christian formula or prescription for how you're supposed to think about these issues. It doesn't tell you how to think.

The other thing it does is it has a lot of focus. It's grace-based, doesn't tell you a thing, but it has focus. What does loyalty to Jesus Christ look like? It's just such a simple question. You know, when you're involved in one of these issues and if you're reading the scriptures ... I told Patsy last night before I went to bed, I said, "You know, I'm pretty sure there's not a single cultural issue that is not specifically, not the issue itself, but there's not a specific framework in the scripture for what somebody should do to be loyal to Jesus Christ. It's there."

### **PICKING YOUR BATTLES: A CASE STUDY IN RACIAL RECONCILIATION**

All right. It's important to pick your battles. I thought what I would do is I'd just give you one little short case statement in racial reconciliation.

In 1980, in Orlando, there was a racial disturbance on Parramore Street. It made the national news. I don't remember exactly. Some rocks were thrown. I have kind of this idea there might have been some fire. Somebody might remember that. I don't know. On that day, the next day, I went home for lunch and we had a black woman who would help us clean the house once a week. Her name was Merthie, M-E-R-T-H-I-E. We really had a great relationship. It was beyond employer-employee. I mean, there was a friendship involved there too. I said to her, I said, "Merthie, what's it going to take for us all to figure out how to get along with each other?" She said, "Oh, I don't know." Then I said, "Well, do you have any thoughts about what we might do to make this better?" She said, "Oh, I don't know." Then, I said, "Well, do you have any hope that someday we'll figure this out?" She says, "Oh, I don't know." Then she walked into the other room.

I went into my office, my home office, and I shut the door. I wept like a baby for 30 minutes, just wept like a baby for 30 minutes. I prayed. I didn't say, "What does loyalty to Jesus Christ look like?" but that's basically what I prayed. I said, "Lord, I belong to you. Is there something that you would like me to do? Is there something that I should do, something I can do to respond to this situation?" Because of my friendship with Tom Skinner, best friend for 18 years until he passed away at a young age, African American evangelist, he had taught me that the reason that I was apathetic towards racial reconciliation as a white man is because apathy, the white man's problem being apathy. The problem was that I could have lived my entire life and never known a black person and it would not have affected the outcome of my life. My response was apathy.

He taught me that the reason that so many, not all, but so many black men are angry, well, actually, he would have said at the time, he told me this, that this was a basic, not necessarily an overt anger, but a deep anger on the part of black men because a black can't live for three days without knowing how or least trying to know how white people think because of landlord-tenant relations, vendor-vendee, employer-employee relationships. African American man have to try to understand how white people think. We made a commitment just that we would be friends and we would try to get to know each other. What happened was basically he took away my apathy and I think I took away a lot of his anger as well just by being together.

With that in mind, having seen that happen once, I invited, with the help of Alzo Reddick who, at the time, was a state representative. I don't even know where Alzo is now. He was a professor at Rollins at the time. He helped. I knew a few black men, but with Alzo, who is black, we put together a list of 20 white men and 20 black men. I invited them all to come to a meeting over at Rollins College in one of the auditoriums over there to not try to change Orlando but to see if we could change ourselves just by getting to know each other. What was interesting, of the 40 men who were invited, 20 came. Exactly, you would think I'm rounding these things up. I'm not. 40 were invited. 20 came, exactly 10 black, exactly 10 white. Then, over the course of the morning, it became clear we had two mindsets at this meeting. Half of the men wanted to go do something, change things, get involved in the political structure, pass laws, whatever it is. The other half were saying, "No, no, no. We don't even know each other. Let's slow down here and get to know each other first and then see what happens."

Because I was under the influence of Tom Skinner, I basically steered the group to the relationship-based approach. Then, out of the 20 people, half quit, exactly five whites and exactly five blacks and now we had 10 men left, half black, half white, and we met for the next five years. We met one Saturday a month from 8:30 to noon and meetings rarely ended at noon. It was so interesting because I didn't think I was a racist until we started meeting. Then, I'm saying, "You're kidding me. That's the most ..." Sometimes I would say, "You got to be kidding me. That's so stupid." They would poke back, a black guy would poke back. Sometimes a white guy would poke back too. There's a lot of poking that went on. I remember some really, really tense meetings, but also meetings that were like love fests. One meeting, one month, it would be, "He loves me." Then, the next month, "He loves me not." Then, "He loves me." Then, "He loves me not."

Here's the thing. We changed. So many incredible things, so many churches around this area, ministries around this area, roofs, new shingles on roofs. I remember, I actually even remember driving a former commander of the Black Liberation Army down to the emergency room one day because he was overdosing on drugs in my car, a white businessman from Winter Park driving an African American gangster because I loved him. He was a former guy that was just struggling with drugs. For me, that's what loyalty to Jesus Christ looked like because I had this foundation of this structure of what I believed to be true about the gospel of Jesus and because I also had the desire to see if the gospel of Jesus might be able to influence culture of my own community. I ask you: For the cultural issue that's burning on your mind, what does loyalty to Jesus Christ look like?

#### **A CHALLENGE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF CHRISTIAN MEN: MORE DANIELS IN BABYLON**

Then, finally, here's a challenge for the next generation of Christian men. We had Joseph, who rose to a very high position in the secular Egyptian government. We have Mordecai who rose to a very high position in the secular government of Persia. We have Daniel who rose to, all these men, to basically the prime minister role, a high position in the empire of Babylon. We need more Daniels of Babylon. We do

need more men to go out into civic affairs, the education system, the political systems, whatever else things there are, the business, and be the men of God there and impact the culture by asking the question, "What does loyalty to Jesus Christ look like?"

Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you. I'm sending you out as sheep among wolves so be wise as snakes and gentle as doves as you go." Turn the other cheek. Go the second mile. Pray for those who persecute you. Love your enemies. The Hopi Indians have a saying. Want to know what a man's role in culture is? The Hopi Indians have a saying, "We are the ones we've been waiting for." This is the actual sheet that I presented to my friends at the IHOP, I won't go over it, but I actually have saved this. This, to me, is one of my most treasured documents because, for me, what that was is that was one of my first major efforts to be loyal to Jesus Christ.

A challenge to those of you in the next generation of Christian men. Where are the cultural issues where you can make an impact and what would loyalty to Jesus Christ look like for you? Then, to recall the words of Jesus, "As the Father has sent me into the world, so I am sending you into the world." Let's pray. Heavenly Father, first of all, thank you for your word. Thank you for the example of Jesus. Thank you for showing us how Jesus thought about culture. Help us to think about what one man can do, how we might be a Daniel in Babylon, how we might impact our culture, what our role might be in the current culture as a man. I pray that you would help each of us be loyal to the thoughts that you, by your Holy Spirit, put into our hearts and minds. I pray this in your name, Jesus, Christ. Amen.