

THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE

We cannot separate people from their culture. Religious beliefs, values, clothing, food, education, work, leisure, governmental systems, home life, roles of men and women and many other things make up cultures. Our Lord intends to transform individuals, societies and cultures. People from every tribe and tongue will one day be before his throne (Revelation 7:9). Even now people from many nations are bringing their unique language and cultural expressions to the worship the Lord of all the earth.

All which is truly good in cultures around the world is enhanced by new life in Christ. All aspects of cultures which are unjust, evil or incomplete will be transformed by our Lord. Many aspects of cultures are neither good nor bad, they are just different (for example: some ethnic groups like rice while others prefer pasta, some like shirts and pants while others prefer robes).



While the religious differences between Christians and Muslims are significant, sometimes cultural differences can be even greater sources of misunderstanding and mistrust. Different perspectives can be opportunities to learn from each other. Understanding cultural differences may enhance our ability to proclaim Christ as well as a Muslim's ability to receive our message.

For Prayer:

The ability to understand and appreciate other cultures is a gift from God.

Am I able to appreciate other cultures?

Am I willing to lay aside prejudice, feelings of cultural superiority and nationalistic pride to welcome, appreciate and love people from other cultures?



Here are some basic differences between Western culture and many African and Asian cultures (These characteristics are generalizations. There may be many exceptions in various nations and regions.)

Western societies:

Individualism, independence and initiative are encouraged

Time oriented (exact times, for example: one arrives on time)

Future oriented (seeing opportunities and foreseeing problems)

Performance oriented (ability and accomplishments are important)

Freedom to show weakness

Egalitarian relationships

Direct communication

Analytical thinking / concept oriented

African and Asian societies:

Community / group oriented

Event oriented (general times, example: arrival when an event happens)

Present oriented (enjoy the present, take action when crises develop)

Status oriented (class, age, family and reputation are important)

Fear of showing weakness or admitting failures (shame cultures)

Indirect communication (seeking to not offend or to dishonor)

Holistic thinking

Experience / circumstance oriented