



Culture, Christ, & Kingdom Seminar Study Guide (Chapter excerpts) by Richard Twiss © 1998

Chapter Six

Which Group of People is God's Favorite?

...he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to the him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter kill and eat." But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again. Then he said to them, you know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. Acts 10:10-16, 28, 34-35.

In this account we see Peter, a Jewish man, experience God speaking to Him in a trance or dream. At the time, Jewish people were not to associate with people from other ethnic or people groups - it was socially and religiously forbidden. He had been brought up by his parents, extended family and community into a certain way of thinking about other nations.

The Jewish people believed they were superior to others and fully believed it was the way God wanted them to think. They brought an old-covenant view of the kingdom with them into their new found faith in Jesus Christ as Messiah. It was their old covenant "worldview" of the kingdom that produced in their hearts and minds a cultural ethnocentricity that resulted in the belief, among believing Jews that salvation was for the Jews only. We read in Acts 11:1 that when Peter gave his report to the Apostles and leaders in Jerusalem, about how the Holy Spirit had fallen on the Gentiles (Acts 10:48), resulting in their salvation, speaking in tongues, and baptism, the Apostles criticized Peter for even preaching the gospel to them.

Bear in mind that these leaders and apostles were the mature, heavyweight spiritual leaders of the Church who had walked and talked with Jesus, who were filled and anointed with the Holy Spirit, who had performed numerous miracles, and were the handpicked individuals Jesus Himself had personally chosen to be the leaders of His Church. But they had grossly misinterpreted the plan and purpose of the Father to establish an entire Kingdom of priests, and a holy nation, within the narrow boundaries of Judaism, which resulted in the belief that salvation was God's free gift for the Jews, and still not for the Gentiles. They believed the Kingdom of Heaven Jesus preached about was confined to the "nation-state" called Israel, not the Gentile nations of the whole earth.

Before they became followers of Jesus they believed that salvation was through the law for the Jew. Now, after becoming His followers, they brought that same thinking or "worldview" with them into their spiritual rebirth. Before they were born-again, they were immersed into their culture and were heavily ethno-centric, condescending, judgmental, and arrogant in their views of other tribes and nations, namely all gentile peoples. Now, they had become believers in the Jesus way and loved Him with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind, yet because their old worldview remained essentially intact, they become born-again bigots.

However, in Acts 10 God was introducing an entirely new and revolutionary "Kingdom Worldview" to His followers through the vision given to Peter and the ensuing outpouring of the Holy Spirit on every tribe, tongue, and nation - the Gentiles. Finally in Acts 11:18, the apostles and leaders in Jerusalem "get it." They embrace the revelation of the Father's love and heart for all peoples everywhere, and rejoice that repentance and everlasting life has been granted even unto the Gentile nations. The church in North America is starting to "get it" with regard to the Father's heart for First Nations people and their cultures.

We too, like Peter, are experiencing God speak to us concerning a new way of thinking about and loving people - our "gentile" neighbors and community members - especially as it relates to the First Nations or host people of the land.

Peter's conclusion is that God does not regard anyone with any sense of favoritism or partiality, based simply on his or her nation of origin, or ethnic or cultural background.

Therefore he, Peter, was to no longer to show national favoritism, cultural ego-centrism, regard others in an inferior and condescending way or refer to anyone in derogatory terms like, "unclean or common." Peter then concluded that God accepts all men and women, regardless of ethnicity, nation, and culture equally well, based on whether or not "they fear Him and work righteousness."

Chapter Twelve

Sophisticated and Primitive Idolatry Reclaiming and Repossessing Cultural Forms

Creation has underneath it, an original intent. All things were created by God, and for God, and for His good pleasure they exist. God created all things for His glory. In developing a contextualized style of ministry we are looking to see cultural forms or creation (when and where not forbidden by scripture), restored to original intent - praise and worship to the one true and Almighty God through His Son, Jesus the Christ.

Fallen man uses God's creation "handiwork" in a misdirected manner in idol worship. Worship involves the use of musical instruments, dance, art, and ceremony - handiwork to express devotion. Can handiwork - drums, traditional dress, some ceremonial practices, dance - be redeemed/repossessed and restored to original intent by Christian people? I will refer to the idolatry as it applies to tribal peoples as "primitive" and that of the modern capitalist as "sophisticated." Both are equally displeasing, sinful and eternally condemning.

Basically when speaking of redeeming cultural forms, I am speaking of redeemed believers in Christ, repossessing various forms, practices, objects, or expressions, that have been erroneously given away or surrendered to ungodly or idolatrous uses and practices, then seeing them transformed for Christ-honoring purposes.

"I also mean restoring those cultural expressions that were stripped from us by an ethnocentric missions mindset.

"All of this for the singular and sole purpose of restoring them to original intent - Praise and worship to Almighty God, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"I see this as an integral dimension of the Great Commission to win the lost, make disciples, and see the Church multiplied.

For our study let's begin by looking at the "redemption of money," wealth being a cultural expression or concept. For example, can unrighteous mammon - money - be redeemed for the benefit of the Church? The Bible declares that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Is it possible that this object of heartfelt human affection that results in the inspiration of all kinds of evil (1 Tim 6:10) activities can be sanctified and then used for churchly purposes?

(1 Tim 6:10 NIV) "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

Can money/wealth/valuable possessions "objects" formerly used as an expression of idol worship be redeemed or sanctified for God-honoring purposes? It is clear from Scripture that money can be an idol, and so become a focus of human worship, affection and devotion for some. In the Old Testament Baal means "master" and signifies ownership and may denote locality - a sphere of interest. One of the Caanaite Baals (false gods) was named Hamon and meant "Lord of Abundance or of Wealth." I believe it was understood that wealth can have a spiritual dynamic attached to it. At times they gave recognition to a deity/idol that was believed to have some level of spiritual authority or influence in the realm of money/finance/wealth.

(Song of Solomon 8:11) "Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon; he leased the vineyard to keepers; everyone was to bring for its fruit a thousand silver coins."

We know that money/wealth can at times become spiritually personified in the form of insatiable greed and avarice, gaining control over people and regions, bringing in spiritual darkness - an evil. The people were required to pay homage and sacrifice at the site of this vineyard. We have all seen and read how the love and pursuit of money/wealth - greed - has been the cause of many broken families, ruined lives, murder, horrible human atrocities and deception that led people to an eternity of separation from God. Worshiping the Baal of money, and the attached material possessions is no less eternally condemning than worshiping the Baal of an animal, wood carving, or mountain. Jesus himself said you cannot serve God and Money (Matt 6:24). Money in the context of worship is a "religious pursuit or object." In the context of worship, money contains a spiritual dynamic and when "loved" and "served" as a master by human beings, is no less an object of idol worship than any Native "religious or sacred object," i.e. drum, fetish, symbol, dance, animal, spirit, and so on. In American culture we see the fruit of the love of money as "materialism."

(Matt 6:24 NIV) "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

Reject and Replace or Sanctify and Redeem

How is it then, that we readily teach those of European roots and ancestry, or western capitalistic economic practices, around the world to sanctify the "religious object" of money for churchly use all the time? We don't say to the wealthy Caucasian capitalist when they come to Christ, "burn all your filthy lucre," "destroy your expensive automobiles," "tear down your idolatrous mansion," all the outward trappings and artifacts of their idolatry." Rather we say, "instead of using your wealth for sinful purposes, use it for Godly purposes." We tell them to sanctify their money and see it redeemed for Christ honoring purposes to support missionaries and feed the poor. We actually teach these people they should give one tenth of all their "tainted" money to the church.

I see this as a grossly inconsistent application of biblical truth from one people group to another. I would even go so far as to call it a hypocritical double standard between Native and non-native peoples.

To be true to scripture what is good for the Caucasian must be good for the Native. If we teach the capitalist to apply the work of Jesus Christ and His work on the cross to sanctify and redeem the expressions or trappings of their idolatry for

the glory of God, then to be true to God's Word we must teach the same approach to Native peoples as well. We must stop making this erroneous artificial and ethnocentric differentiation between the idolatry of these two groups, the primitive and the sophisticated.

However, when Amazonian tribal members come to Christ, we tell them to destroy their religious objects, stop using their demonic music and worship dances because anything used previously for idol worship is of the devil and must be discarded and replaced. Why don't we say to him, like we say to the Caucasian new believers about their stuff, instead of dancing to the volcano, dance to the Creator of it, Jesus Christ. Or, instead of playing your drum to appease evil spirits, keep using your drum, but now use it to express your love to Jesus. To fail to apply the same redemptive standards to Native cultural traditions that we do to modern Caucasian cultural traditions and their idol of money and materialism is simply gross hypocrisy!

What we have on the one hand is modern and "sophisticated idolatry" (love of money) and the other "primitive idolatry" (worshipping spirits or creation). If both of these idolaters die at the same time does God make any distinction between the degrees of darkness of their respective forms of idolatry? Does one form of idolatry cause any deeper separation from God than the other? You tell me, from a Kingdom perspective, is it worse to serve money or a golden image?

Borrowing From the Pagans

Here are a few examples of how the western and American church has, over the centuries, borrowed concepts, words, and religious practices from the "pagans" and incorporated them into the liturgy and practices of today churches. (For a detailed study of these topics, I highly recommend the source of some of these perspectives found in the book, "Eternity In Their Heart's" by Don Richardson).

The word "God" comes from the pre-Christian European occultist name for God, "Gott" or "Gud." It was a name in use by the religious leaders before the first missionaries arrived and later adopted into use in the English language. When Abraham met Melchizedek, Melchizedek blessed him in the name of the Canaanite God El Elyon, "God Most High."

Genesis 14: 18-20 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Paul and later John accepted Plato's "Theos" (from which we get theological - the study of "God") and "Logos" (the Word of God) as valid Greek names for the True God. A Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, first used the term Logos around 600 B.C. to designate the divine reason or plan which coordinates a changing universe. Paul later appropriated this term - Logos - as a title for Jesus Christ.

Two centuries before Christ, three great Greek philosophers, Xenophanes, Plato, and Aristotle, all used the name Theos as a personal name for one supreme god in their writings. Paul adopted this term Theos for his New Testament writing and preaching.

Again these names were already in use by the pagans long before Christianity emerged on the scene. Can it thus be said then that we are actually using the names of "false" gods as part of our Christian faith? Using the same logic I have heard from many, true followers of Christ should no longer defile God by using pagan names for deities to describe Him.

All of God's creation has an original intent. All things were created by Him and for Him and for His good pleasure they exist.

(Col 1:15-18 NIV) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy.

God created all things for His glory. In developing a contextualized style of ministry, we are looking to see "Biblically appropriate" cultural forms or creation, restored to original intent - praise and worship to Almighty God. A contextualized approach to ministry does not advocate the renaming of demonic powers or evil spirits in order to make them "sanctified." We're simply talking about "stuff" that God Himself made - rocks, trees, animals, plants, mountains, etc. - the good and holy stuff of creation.

This Is Where We Draw The Line

We see certain forms or practices that cannot be used in any form for Christian worship. This is not an exhaustive list but would include, for example; 1.) The prescribed liturgical use of mind-altering substances. 2.) Sacrifice of living things and blood sacrifices. 3.) The promotion of and participation in sexual immorality. 4.) Physical torture and self-abuse. 5.) At times the use of a particular religious item or object that has been specifically made to be used in worship, homage, or appeasement to "another" god or spirit and bare the markings of that deity. And certainly any practice clearly in opposition to sound Biblical doctrine. In the following passage in Galatians the Word of God gives us a detailed list of activities, attitudes and sinful behaviors common to all peoples that obviously cannot be pressed into the service of Christ.

(Gal 5:17-21 NIV) For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are

not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Where the Bible says "no" we stand in agreement with the scriptures and say "no"!

Among other things, however, nowhere in the Bible, in the context of worship of the one True God, is any musical instrument or style condemned or prohibited for Christian worship. Nor are dance or pageantry and the use of feathers, dances, or clothing.

Topics for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What makes something evil?
2. Can cultural forms previously used in ungodly or idolatrous purposes be sanctified and redeemed for Christian use? Why or why not? Give an example.
3. When should something previously used in an idolatrous manner not be sanctified for Christian use? Can you give an example?
4. What justifies playing the type of bongo drums originated for use by voodoo witchdoctors for their magic and curses, in many of our Christian services?
5. What is God's original intent for music? What makes Christian music "Christian?"
6. According to some, why do messianic Jews insist on using their traditional religious dancing in Church when scripture says they are free from their old ceremonies and laws - religious bondage?
7. If money has been an idol, is it right to teach people to sanctify this particular idol for Christian purposes?
8. Why has the church taught Anglo converts to sanctify their idol of mammon and native believers to reject theirs?
9. What other cultural expressions of First Nations people do you feel the Church has wrongfully taught new believers to reject?
10. What is our Biblical guideline for making these kinds of determinations?