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## **CULTURAL PRESSURES VERSUS BIBLICAL VALUES** **(Dealing with cultural pressures that conflict with biblical values)**

**TEXT:** Titus 1:12-13

### **INTRODUCTION**

I am very concerned by the failure of the African church to impact its society. Jesus said to his disciples, “You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world.” In other words, the church of Jesus Christ is supposed to have a salting and lighting effect upon the world. This is what has taken place in history right across the world. Christianity has been the vanguard of civilization. Christianity finds people living in darkness, chained to superstitions, poverty and squalor. As men and women are converted, and sit under the life-giving preaching of the Word of God, they develop a desire to read the Bible for themselves. Thus they learn to read and write. As they read their Bibles to themselves and to their children, they begin to see who they are from God’s perspective and how they ought to translate their faith into works in the home, in society, in the workplace, and in the environment. The result is a total transformation of life and living. This is what has led to the growth of education, improved social and health provisions, new forms of local and state governments, civil liberties, human rights, women’s rights, children’s rights, scientific discoveries, etc.

Yet, when we come to Africa the story is different. Christianity has been on African soil for well over one hundred years. We have so many churches and yet there is very little moral, spiritual and intellectual impact on our society. The levels of corruption, immorality, crime, poverty, HIV and AIDS, etc., are still on the increase. Do not get me wrong. I am not saying the West is better. However, at least in the West, they rejected Christianity first and then the consequences followed. In Africa, we have the Christian faith sitting comfortably side-by-side with wickedness of the highest order. How can we explain this?

### **THE CARICATURE OF CULTURES**

Cultures tend to take on a certain life-form that can, with a little thinking, be reduced to a few phrases. Often these life-forms become the very chains that hold back their progress as a people. Hence, the apostle Paul in our text was able to quote a Cretan poet (Epimenides) who described his own people as liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. Do you honestly expect progress from a people like this? Of course not! It is the same for us as Africans. For instance, the proverbial “African time” militates against our development as a people because we do not really value time.

The natural tendency is that of our culture becoming the culture of the church.

(1) I have already referred to the African culture being very respectful. Hence, the “chief” of African culture is now the super “pastor” phenomenon.

(2) Syncretism, if not addressed, is inevitable—with the worship of God sitting comfortably with reverence for ancestral spirits. This is because in African culture there are at least three levels of spirit beings—God, angels/demons, and ancestral spirits. Being in good books with the latter is important in order to secure favour from the higher ones. Thus, without rejecting biblical revelations about God and angels, an African Christian can also be involved in rituals to appease his ancestral spirits without sensing any contradiction.

(3) Closely tied up with this is our sense of fatalism. Although an African will speak about God, he is generally a God “far away”. It is the ancestral spirits who are near. So, they provide the protection we need, as long as we appease them. So, instead of doing all we can to improve hygiene and health and safety and security. We tend to be content with the assurance that if we are in good books with the ancestral spirits all will be well, and if we are not all will not be well, whatever we do.

(4) Also, I have referred to the strong sense of community in the African culture. Allegiance to the community—e.g. the extended family system—tends to be stronger than allegiance to biblical truths and ethics. This can be seen from the failure of Christian families to rule their individual homes once “uncle” has sent his instructions. Hence, Christian testimony in the society is watered down in the name of respect for “the family”.

(5) What about the reason why Africans do not develop their immediate environment? One reason is that most Africans have two homes. One is where they work and the other is where their ancestry land is. The result is often a failure to develop both. They have no sense of allegiance to develop the place of their temporal habitation because they are simply there to earn a living, but neither are they in the village long enough to have any meaningful impact there. Thus, those who are in the city rarely really get attached to the gospel work there. They are largely spectators and indifferent passengers because “this is not home”. But even “at home” they are not really involved. Hence, they are not impacted and do not impact God’s world as the gospel demands they should.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF CHRISTIANITY**

Instead of the wrong aspects of our culture ruining the church, the principles of Scripture should reform our culture. God, in reconciling humanity to himself, demands a certain lifestyle from all of us. That which goes against the grain of his moral law must be changed (e.g. laziness must give way to hard work). This is what Titus 2 and 3 are all about. Titus was to ensure that he is not just teaching sound doctrine but also “what is in accord with” sound doctrine, i.e. a life-style that exhibits this sound doctrine. If the African church is to impact its culture, the pulpit in the African church must also insist on this—and so should Christian parents as they teach their children in the homes.

(1) Our task is to insist on leadership in the home and in the church that has broken free from the crippling effect of the culture around and is now subject to the Word of God (Titus 1).

(2) We must also insist on “the grace of God” making a difference between believers and unbelievers in any culture so that Christians are to be characterized by biblically sound good works (2:14, 3:1, 8, 14). So, there is no excuse for anyone.

(3) There will be times when conformity to biblical norms will bring with it persecution (Matthew 10:34ff). Christians must be warned about this and told to pay the price for the Christ who paid the price for them!

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, what is the challenge posed by African culture upon the church of Jesus Christ? Since we are called to affect our world for good, we need to ensure that Christians are taught that they have a duty to live lives that will transform their society by being zealous for good works—starting at their individual level, domestic level, and going on to affect their entire communities and nations.