

A Redeemed Culture #1 - Can a Culture Be Redeemed?

Introduction – We are beginning a broad study through the scriptures of what might be called a biblical view of culture. Not unlike Francis Schafer's book title, we will be considering "*How should we then live?*" as the Bible instructs us. As we do so, we will address everything from family life to church community to civic duties and vocational callings. We will see what the scripture teaches us with regard to the kingdom of heaven upon the earth and God's promises during this age. And we will see what our attitude should be towards life on earth and our hope towards heaven.

We begin with this question: Can a culture be redeemed? We understand that individuals are redeemed, changed, sanctified. But should we have any hope that when enough men and women are regenerate that there will become a culture that itself becomes more and more holy? Or should we simply expect that here on earth, things will get worse and worse until the day of Christ's return?

Gen 1:26-28; 2:8-9 - After creating the heavens and the earth, one of the best things that God made was a beautiful garden near the top of a mountain. Having created Adam (man), God placed him in the garden to tend and cultivate it. This garden was on the east side of a land called Eden and was the first sanctuary for man. Here he met with God and here he worked, worshipping God and tending to the land God had given him. Here he learned from God how to be a creator: how to take things of the earth and fashion them for useful and glorious purposes.

Gen 2:15-25 - As man worked (tend) and guarded (keep) the earth, God declared that it was not good for Adam to do so alone. While naming the animals, it became clear that there was no suitable helper for Adam among the creatures, and so God put Adam in a deep death-like sleep, took a rib from his side, and fashioned woman, Eve, from that rib. Now, together, in a family, a society, a culture, Adam and Eve would fulfill the cultural mandate to fill, subdue, and take dominion of the earth.

Man was the image-bearer and was able to self-consciously do his works to the glory of God without any hesitation, with complete obedience and joy in serving His Creator. But sin changed everything.

Gen 3 - First Eve, and then Adam doubted the word of the Lord and took and ate of the forbidden tree. This brought death to Adam and Eve, and to all of mankind (Rom 5:12). But God is longsuffering with us and had glorious plans in the midst of this tragedy. He cursed the serpent and promised that the woman would have her revenge. In His curse upon the woman and the man, the cultural mandate remained, but it would now be with much pain and sweat and toil. He put them out of the Garden as a protection that they would not remain in this state forever (v22ff). This is because He intended to reverse the effects of the sin and the curse through a propitiation, a perfect sacrifice (1 John 4:9-10). Throughout the OT, this bloody sacrifice was prefigured, beginning with the animal skins to cover Adam and Eve (3:21).

To What End Is Our Redemption? (Eph 2:8-10) – We are not saved by any good works. But God makes clear that we are saved to good works. What good works? Ultimately, the good works of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. But this means that we are to be doing something here upon the earth. In essence, we have been made in the New Adam to go into the New Earth and cultivate the New Garden-City of God, discipling the nations to obey everything God has commanded (Matt 28:20). These works could be likened to the tending of the Garden in Gen 2:15.

2 Tim 3:16-17 – The Scripture instructs us in every work that we do.

Col 1:9-10 – God's blessing upon our works is the only way any of our works will be fruitful. Good works can only be good when done self-consciously to the glory of God (Psalm 127:1, 90:17). By the grace of God, we are made complete in every good work to do His will (Heb 13:20-21).

1 Cor 15:58 – We are to abound in the work of the Lord, and men are to see them in such a way that glory is brought to the Father (Matt 5:16).

Our Inheritance (Eph 1:11-12, 18) – In Christ, we have been given a rich inheritance, one that we cannot understand unless God grants us a spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of Him (1:17). Interestingly, when addressing the children of the church, Paul ties the command to obey their parents to the promise of inheritance (6:1-3) and this time the promise is to live long on all of the earth. The Cultural Mandate (Gen 1:28) and promise of life has been given to us again in Jesus Christ in the Great Commission. We have the firstfruits of the Spirit (Rom 8:23) which is producing in us these good works (the fruit of the spirit, the obedience of faith, etc), and this increases our hope for what we eagerly await, the final redemption of our body, which is the final end of the curse – no more death and complete glorification.

The Story of Redemption Includes a Redeemed Culture – The progressive sanctification of individuals could be seen as a microcosm of the progressive sanctification of the church, the sanctified society/culture of the kingdom of God. We were placed in a culture in perfect communion with God. After the fall, we were removed from that place in consequence of our sin. But we were given a promise, and in due time, the Promise Himself came to earth, claiming all nations for Himself; all cultures were now under His Lordship, His redemption. This New Culture will have a city, a garden, and a river again, that waters the tree of life which provides the healing of the nations (Rev 21-22, esp.22:1-2).