

Discern Your Culture

by Albert Mohler

Albert Mohler emphasizes the critical need for discernment among Christians to navigate and engage with culture effectively.

Duration: 55:51

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Psalm 110:1, Matthew 22:37-40, Matthew 22:46, Mark 12:35-37, Luke 10:27, Romans 13:10

Topics: "Culture"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of engaging with different cultures and understanding their language and symbols. He warns against making the mistake of assuming we can understand another culture by simply observing or briefly immersing ourselves in it. The speaker also highlights the dangers of being seduced by the culture we live in and emphasizes the need for discernment as Christians. He concludes by emphasizing the importance of engaging with culture for the glory of God and for the purpose of sharing the gospel.

Transcript

This message by Al Mohler titled discern your culture is made available to you through Sovereign Grace Ministries It was recorded during the third general session at our new attitude 2007 conference Al serves as president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky Discernment what a great cause that has brought you together here What a great issue of concern if there's any one thing lacking in the church today among Christians It must certainly be discernment. That would be the one explanation for why things are as they are How can the church be so deceived by false teaching? How can the church be so? Enculturated and acculturated. How can the church be so easily seduced? How can Christians find themselves being so indistinguishable from the world in the world find Christians? So Indistinguishable from the cells.

How can this happen? How can so many? Christians be seduced by sin. It has to be a lack of discernment You know discernment is one of those things you have to have in order to live and in every context You have to have certain skills and discernment and I had to learn that the way many of you had to learn that as kids You know, there's certain things you do certain things. You don't do there's certain things you touch There's certain things you don't touch and I guess I was never more impressed with the absolute necessity of that than when I was a Boy Scout Yeah, there you go Be prepared and I love being a Boy Scout.

I love doing all the Boy Scout kind of stuff and I especially like being a Boy Scout in Florida where I grew up because that brought you into proximity with snakes Yes, I have a snake in my office a live one a California Kingsnake I didn't ask for it But I had a 13 year old son who was with me when I was on a speaking engagement in a church in California They took us out in the desert because they loved me and they know they loved my son and they knew he loved snakes And they took him out there and then he was holding this little snake and they said don't you want to take that home? Don't ever do that Yeah, yeah, because then you got a you're the you're the bad dad if you say no I don't think it's a great idea to take a snake home on American Airlines and Anyway, it didn't work. And by the way, that's not the way it works The way it works is you fly home and then the snake flies separate in its own little container I got to tell you a hint when you walk through the airport with a big box. It says warning serpent live You don't wait in any lines You just walk right through that's right But you know in growing up as a Boy Scout and being involved in all that kind of stuff There's certain things you have to learn such as in Florida.

There are two snakes look very much alike One is the Scarlet Kingsnake and the others a coral snake As a matter of fact, they look almost identical to each other and as a Boy Scout They teach you a little poem to remember which one is safe and which one is deadly and that's a red and black friend of Jack red and yellow kill a fellow Now that's really good I mean you get you're working on the merit badge, you know The snake badge and you're kind of working your way up and you can say yo You remember that and red and black friend of Jack. I didn't yet kill a fellow That's because the bands are just slightly different if red and black touch your safe and red and yellow touch you're dead That's easy to remember why you're kind of studying for the merit badge And I was out by myself in the woods one day and I saw about 13 I saw a snake I looked at it and I went I forgot the poem And it was true. I couldn't pull it for anything.

I was looking at it and going got the right stripes. You're my pal Got the wrong stripes, this is the end of al I don't I don't think I'm gonna pick up the snake I'm not I don't trust the poem. I But the fact is One is absolutely harmless and the other is the most deadly venomous reptile in North America And if you get it wrong It's a big didn't big mistake big problem.

I Grew up in the Charlie the tuna generation Maybe you remember Charlie. He talks remember Charlie's problem Charlie thought that starkest was looking for tuna with good taste When actually starkest was looking for a tuna that tastes good Yeah, obviously a different generation at work here But there's a big difference. We know a matter of taste discernment There are a lot of people who think the discernment is nothing more than a matter of taste And in fact, they think that everything is basically a matter of taste morality ethics Law, all of this is just a matter of taste truth to many people It's nothing more than a matter of taste Deciding the proposition a is true and the proposition B is untrue is for them Nothing more than then saying I like proposition a and I don't like proposition B Discernment is knowing not only which is right but discernment is knowing how important something is Discernment is knowing what's central and what's peripheral Discernment is knowing what's a truth issue and what is a taste issue What do you like the color pink is a taste issue? Whether there is one true and living.

God is a truth issue Discernment is a matter of deadly seriousness discernment is indeed something that is absolutely synchronous with maturity You can't have maturity without discernment and one of the signs of maturity is discernment Discernment How do we discern the culture this is a big issue That in fact the culture is a big issue because we can't get away from the question Let's just define culture from what we're going to talk about it. Let's talk about we're talking about is it is it art? Is it Starbucks? Is it Madonna? Is it the Parthenon? What's culture? Culture is a system of language symbols laws products and institutions along with presuppositions That emerge from the human situation You put two human beings together.

There is culture in the midst of them.

Why? Because they're going to try to talk they're going to try to communicate language itself is one of the first fundamental building blocks of culture Language itself comes with all kinds of presuppositions. Just try to learn another language and you'll learn there's another worldview That's entirely tied into that language. Do you have nouns that have different gender? Haha, isn't that interesting when you go from Say English to French Why do they have to gender their nouns? And how do they come up with this? I Mean really what gender is a piece of paper? And what why do they do this? And of course, they think English is just so reductionistic and crude Because we just have the paper that paper They introduce themselves to paper Mademoiselle paper.

I mean, it's just it's a completely different thing There's an entire worldview that is embedded in the language you put two people together They're going to start using not only language So they're going to start talking about symbols and then they're going to start communicating to each other in some overt ways and in some Covert ways and let me tell you your generation is one of the most interesting generations in terms of communicating over and covertly Yeah, I'm serious I got one day I'm gonna find someone safe to ask what certain things mean And maybe I'm not up to that yet. I'm not I'm not really sure I mean when I don't understand the t-shirts, that's when I get worried yeah, my 15 year old son has a t-shirt Says I can please only one person a day This is not your day And tomorrow's not looking good either Yeah, I just told him I said hey, I just wanna let you know as long as you get God and two parents the shirts out I mean, that's just already. We're too reductionistic here But you know what that says a whole lot about a generation right there Even if the shirt never makes it out of the drawer.

It says a whole lot What a cargo shorts mean, I mean how much do you have to carry anyway, I Mean seriously, do you wear those you have to pull off it like the truckway station on the interstate and you know Register your cargo. I don't know what that's going on here I Don't know You're saying something with this and we all know at a deeply serious level people are communicating by how they dress And we know what a lot of people are saying by how they dress Ladies please understand what you're saying by how you dress Discernment comes because culture is all around us discernment is necessary just to negotiate our way around We're receiving all these messages. We are communicating in linguistic terms The symbols are all around us and we're we're always embedded in this Aristotle the great philosopher of the ancient Greek world Said that there was a problem in Human understanding that he best identified with the fish.

He called it the conundrum of the fish And he said if you ask a fish What it is to be wet. He can't give you an honest answer Because what's all he's ever known He doesn't know he is wet. If you don't know what wets like you have to ask someone who's not a fish For whom water is not the natural environment Well, most human beings are like Aristotle's fish.

They're swimming in the culture. I don't know what's there They just assume they'd take it for granted. There's no discernment.

There's no active mental activity There's no active mental energy. There's no Christian discernment. It's just a matter of swimming in the stuff.

I want to suggest to you five wrong ways of understanding the culture One would be just to adopt the motto. Let's get completely wet In other words, let's just give ourselves to the culture. Let's just join the fish Let's just jump in this giant pool and let's just let's just assume that it's all Neutral Culture is never neutral Every single word every single syllable every single precept law every single Fundamental structure of the

society has an agenda It is dangerous.

The church can't possibly say let's just dive in and let's just assume that it's safe Let's just assume that the culture itself is a safe environment And let's assume that the culture gets to define truth and reality and all the rest. That's a culture a to Christianity It's a disaster for the church But there's an equal and opposite disaster and that's to say we're going to stay completely dry We're just going to remove ourselves from the culture. We're not going to have anything to do with the culture We're just going to stay completely dry.

We're going to separate ourselves. We'll just try it Just try it just just try to separate from the culture How are you going to talk? What are you going to wear? What are you going to eat? All these are products of the culture In reality, we're deeply deeply enmeshed in an entire system and network of culture Now like Aristotle's fish the danger is that we are unaware of this One of the dangers is in thinking we're not in the culture when we are And this is where you hear a lot of conservative Christians make mistake They say well, we're not really in the culture. We're gonna we're gonna stay out of the culture We're gonna sit back and and we're gonna let the culture go to hell and we're just gonna not be a part of it Guess what? We are a part of it.

What your kids wearing? What are they listening to? What are the symbols that they are familiar with? This is impossible. We're deeply embedded in a culture right now. I Mean all that just went on up here Only makes sense in this culture Now it's not to say that the truth that's affirmed here only makes sense in this culture.

That's something precious and important But the actual tonalities the collection of Instruments the the video and all the rest all those brand names that were up there in that video. They they make sense here they wouldn't make sense in Central Asia or Sub-Saharan Africa and Frankly withdrawing from the culture this idea that will just stay completely dry doesn't work because it just doesn't work the late US Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan Talked about being in upstate New York and visiting in an Amish community and the Amish are one of these groups that has tried very Seriously without making fun of them. They've made a serious effort to remove themselves from the culture The problem is it just can't be done Let me give you an example because Moynihan was talking to this father and this this father said I'm really worried about our younger generation every generation is worried about the younger generation the Amish too and They said my daughter for instance is flirting with Catholicism and we're trying to figure out where it's coming from Well Moynihan who was Catholic thought this was very interesting.

So he said, how do you think your daughter is flirting with Catholicism? He said I heard her talking with a friend and she used the phrase Madonna. She used the name Madonna and Moynihan went ooh He thinks the problem is Catholicism. He has no clue what's going on here Well, if your 16 year old daughter in an Amish community in upstate New York Is affected by culture.

We know we are all affected by culture. It's just around us all the time. We can't escape from it It's delusional to think we can stay completely dry there is another mistake and this is that we can reduce our cultural engagement to taking a dip and this is another thing Christians do and Sometimes do recklessly and that's the idea that we can just kind of drop in the culture where we find it convenient And we also sometimes do this by dropping in the culture thinking that we can emerge safe We can dry ourselves off and so you find there are some Christians who try to Say I'm gonna go after this sector of the culture or that sector of the culture and I'm not going to have anything to do With all the other things connected to it.

Here's the bad news culture is a system It's an entire web It's not like you can touch one part of it not touch every other part of it The ocean is really a good metaphor that's all connected all that waters connected There is no basic way to enter the culture without being in contact with the entire system Doesn't mean you have to accept all its products doesn't mean you have to watch all its movies Doesn't mean you have to listen to all this music. It does mean they're all being sold in the same economy It does mean they're all influencing each other It does mean that eventually there's a filter down system taking a dip doesn't work. The other mistake fourth mistake is taking a sip This is where we think we can understand another culture by going and for instance We're gonna understand what it's like to be Italian.

So we'll go to an Italian restaurant Or the new evangelical variety is we're gonna go do an immersion experience in another culture We're a good 72 hours. We're gonna be there We'll understand those people after we're there That's ridiculous You can't really sip a culture. It is such a deep such a a Complex reality that it takes serious study to figure out what it is The other mistake we make is thinking that we can treat culture by watching an aquarium This is kind of the National Geographic approach and this is by the way the typical American arrogant approach We pick up National Geographic look at all these other cultures And that's how that magazine came about by the way in the great age of exploration in the Victorian era The National Geographic Society was established because here there were all these unknown lands and now there was the development of photography And you could come back with all these amazing things and you go and find peoples that had never seen You know Europeans before and Europeans had never known of them before and they bring back all these pictures and all the rest of you look up National Geographic magazine or something like it one of those great Victorian coffee table books and you open it up They're all these bizarre pictures And they are bizarre If you're sitting in London But the reality is there could be someone you know in Indonesia looking at a picture a Piccadilly Circus going that's bizarre or Looking at at a Hollywood movie still and saying that's weird The reality is looking at the aquarium really doesn't help you have to be You have to be engaged with the culture.

You can't just look at it at a distance You've got to talk to people. You've got to listen to them speak. You got to figure out their language You've got to decipher their symbols This is a great challenge by the way for Christian missions It's a great challenge for evangelism in a global age in which it's not only likely It's absolutely automatic that we're going to become far more familiar with other cultures And we're going to find ourselves confronting people from other cultures not out there, but right here Real life means that we're embedded in culture and the most dangerous aspects of the culture may well be the ones that we don't see anymore The the great danger is that the most dangerous things about our own culture are the things we're not even aware of anymore We take them so much for granted.

It's like the furniture in our home in the dark We still know how to get to the bathroom without bumping into anything because it's all there We just take it for granted. We make our own routes in the carpet. We know this and we don't even see it anymore and for Christians this is pretty dangerous because once we have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and there is a new an absolute Reign of Christ in our hearts and we know that that is to be worked out in a different way of seeing Everything the problem is the last things we often see with the eyes of Christ Are the things closest to us? That we don't even think about I Want us to look at Matthew chapter 22 In Matthew chapter 22, we find one of the most amazing engagements between Jesus and The Pharisees and the Sadducees first the Sadducees beginning in verse 23 of Matthew chapter 22 on that day Some Sadducees who say there is no resurrection Came to Jesus and questioned him Asking teacher Moses said if a man dies having no children His brother is next of kin shall marry his wife and raise up children for his brother Now there were seven brothers with us and

the first married and died and having no children left his wife to his brother So also the second and the third down to the seventh last of all the woman died in the resurrection Therefore whose wife of the seven will she be for they had all married her Now this is kind of the ultimate black widow equation right here And this is a woman that had seven husbands all brothers.

This is kind of like wiping out the family with one woman I'm serious. I mean you can you notice there's not an eighth. Let's just put it that way.

But anyway The Sadducees who don't even believe that's why that's why Matthew has inserted that for our understanding They don't even believe there's a resurrection They came and they confronted Jesus and the fact is they really aren't trying to ask an honest question. This is a setup And Jesus sees exactly what they're doing and notice how he responds in verse 29 He says to them you are mistaken not understanding the scriptures or the power of God I love the way Jesus responds to them It's so many times in the Gospels what you hear when they confront Jesus like this he'd say more or less listen boys to be a good thing if you read the Bible and He does this to the Pharisees in Matthew chapter 12 and the 13 when they confront him about his disciples in the Sabbath he does it here and he said you completely misconstrue the scriptures and you You slander the power of God for in the resurrection. They neither marry nor are given in marriage We're like angels in heaven, but regarding the resurrection of the dead.

Haha that thing you deny. Let me make my point here Concerning the resurrection of the dead. Have you not read what was spoken to you by God? I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

He is not the God of the dead but of the living Therefore there must be a resurrection from the dead Jesus says for God is God When the crowds heard this they were astonished at his teaching So Jesus here has been confronted by the Sadducees and I think we can say he pretty deftly Embarrassed them with their question, but the Pharisees are laying back the enemies of the Sadducees They're gonna show they can do better than the Sadducees at confounding Jesus in verse 34 when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees that gathered themselves together and by the way This is so they could come up with their own question One of them a lawyer verse 35 asked Jesus a question testing him teacher Which is the great commandment in the law and he said to him you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with All your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it You shall love your neighbor as yourself on these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets Now while the Pharisees were gathered together Jesus asked them a question What do you think about the Christ whose son is he they said to him the son of David He said to them then how does David in the Spirit call him Lord saying the Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand Until I put your enemies beneath your feet if David then calls him Lord.

How is he his son? Look carefully verse 46 No one was able to answer him a word Nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask him another question Okay, now we all have our favorite gospel passages where we say I wish I'd been there All right. I wish I'd been there because seeing Jesus confronted by the Sadducees and then by the Pharisees and then seeing Jesus turn on the Pharisees and say All right, you asked me a question. Let me ask you a question and Then coming to that conclusion then no one from that point onwards gonna ask him any questions anymore.

I Would love to have been there But in the midst of that conflict Jesus gives us something we desperately need to see he actually gives us a centering set of Commandments an answer to the lawyers question. He

gives us what we know is the great commandment You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind now that of course as you know Your Old Testament is a recitation of what follows the Shema that first verse learned by children in Israel Here Oh Israel the Lord thy God the Lord is one then these words you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart With all your soul with all your mind in the Hebrew most often it's translated strength Jesus here makes it very clear about mind. This is the great and foremost commandment Jesus here tells us what we're talking about discernment.

Well, we're discerning the law while we're discerning morality We're discerning different moral principles that are taught to us in Scripture. Jesus said here is the criterion Here's the first issue God comes first love of God becomes the determining issue. It becomes the great prioritizing issue Love of God is the first commandment and it's love of God that is absolutely comprehensive It's loving God with heart and soul and mind.

This is the great the foremost commandment, but Without skipping a beat Jesus says the second is like it Now you'll recall that the lawyer asked him for the first most important commandment Jesus said here's the first but There's also a second You shall love your neighbor as yourself Then Jesus explained on these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets. Well, there's an exercise in discernment right there We are now told that the two main issues for Christian discernment our love of God and love of neighbor The two main Criteria we are to use in Evaluating the culture come down to this love of God and love of neighbor and Jesus puts them in the right order Love of God comes first We love our neighbor not because it's just right to love our neighbor because he's in proximity to us because we meet someone who's not Ourselves our neighbor Jesus, by the way also completely redefines So that it's no longer limited to kinship or nationality or ethnicity It's now all those made in God's image anyone marked by the Imago Dei which means every single human being is now our neighbor But why do we love our neighbor we love our neighbor because we love God and because God loves our neighbor So there we have a prioritization which comes down to a framework for discernment So, why are we concerned about the culture in the first place?

Why do we seek discernment when thinking about the culture? It is because we love God and because we love our neighbor love of God and love of neighbor becomes us The great passion of our life is to love God the reason for which we were made is to love God We love the one who first loved us. We love the one who loved us in Christ the right beginning point Is to begin with love of God It's the right verb because it is the most basic human verb to love encompasses the most deep and precious things about us Nothing tells us so much about ourselves as our loves And that which we love most is our God The orientation of our life is to be established first by the love of God and then by love of neighbor If we truly do love God, then we will love our neighbor if we truly love God Then we have to be concerned about our neighbor This is a very revolutionary statement even as Jesus expanded on our understanding of what constitutes a neighbor which means any human being Like ourselves made in the image of God and deserving of our treatment as a neighbor because God has made him our neighbor Now this means that Christians if we truly understand this Have to consider every single human being on the planet our neighbor and this means that every single culture on the planet is of our concern Because we have to tie the great commandment to the Great Commission Because God's love his redeeming love is The love that compels us even as we follow that command to go you therefore into all the nations and make disciples Every one of those persons with whom we will ever share the gospel is deeply embedded in a culture and Literally we have to become somewhat Somewhat adept in that culture Discerning in that culture at least

competent in that culture to the extent of language to be able even to speak to them concerning the gospel Augustine that great bishop of the church that framed so much of our Christian thinking in the early generations and early centuries of the church Put it this way.

He said there are basically two cities in his great book the city of God He said there are two cities. There is the heavenly city and there's the earthly city Now Augustine wrote this as he was trying to minister to his own people as the Roman Empire was falling and the Roman Empire was The surest thing on earth they had ever known it was incomprehensible to them that Rome would fall and yet it is falling and it's falling To the barbarians It's not falling to because another organized empire came in in a way that would have been understood to the Romans instead It is falling to the forces of anarchy and to barbarism It seemed impossible and to so many living at that time It seemed that perhaps even everything known was falling apart and Augustine came back and said no for Christians We understand that our citizenship as Paul said is in heaven. We understand as Peter said no matter where we are.

We are resident aliens In whatever culture we find ourselves Rome can fall but the church will not fall Rome can fall but God's reign does not fall And he said there must be a Real cogent and deep mature understanding among Christians or Christians will misread the entire situation There is a city of God and there is a city of man There's a heavenly city and there is an earthly city and there are two loves corresponding to these two cities In the heavenly city, there's nothing but the love of God in the earthly city There is nothing higher than the love of man And he said the problem is that we feel too comfortable in the city of man in the earthly city and Thus when the earthly city begins to crack and when the earthly city begins to crumble we begin to think that all is lost But actually we don't have much invested here Our hope is in heaven and the earthly city is enduring the earthly city Excuse me. The heavenly city is enduring the heavenly city is eternal Even as God himself is eternal and Augustine said we can keep our center of gravity as Christians regardless of what happens in the city of man because we know the Security of the city of God and we know by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been made citizens of the heavenly city and Thus like one of the early martyrs of the church leading his own people in for their execution He said remember they can kill us, but they can't hurt us You only can say that if you know the power of God and if you know that your ultimate Citizenship is in the heavenly city by the blood of Christ But Augustine was also concerned that a fall of Rome some Christians could assume that the earthly city is of no concern if our citizenship is in heaven and If our ultimate concern heavenly city, then let's just focus on the heavenly city Let's go sit on the rooftop and pray for the heavenly city to come for for Christ to come claim his people and let's assume That we have no responsibility of the culture around us Augustine said that too is a problem because if the heavenly city is marked by the love of God For Christians the earthly city we must see is the place where God's love is our responsibility If we love our neighbor, then we must be concerned about the culture if we love our neighbor We must be concerned about the laws of that culture.

We love our neighbor We must wish for our neighbor to know those good things which God would give him We must wish even as in the Lord's Prayer We pray thy kingdom come I will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We pray to see God's revealed will Made manifest in the midst of his human creatures. We understand that this culture is not fundamentally our home We understand that this culture is not the means of salvation We understand that every culture is itself a system of seduction But at the same time we are compelled by the love of the people who are there Care and That care has to become tangible in terms of an intelligent understanding of what culture is and what culture means and how it happens one of the earliest Christians put it this way saying of Christians and of what it meant to be a disciple of Christ.

He said for us No place is home and all places are home That's a great way to look at it So long as we're in this life and so long as we're a part of the terrestrial city We have no home and every place is home It's because our ultimate citizenship is in heaven. Everything else is just a matter of Seeking by love of God and love of neighbor to be faithful wherever we are Knowing we will not be here for long but also knowing That this presents us with a great challenge when we think about discerning the culture We have to do an exercise in a systematic theology I want to ask you to follow along with me as we do a little exercise in a systematic theology related to the culture I think about the culture. We have to think about how we're going to know anything the doctrine of Revelation comes in And this is solo scriptura Once again, it is my scripture that we are guided in our understanding of these things That means that fundamentally our epistemology is from the heavenly city not from the earthly city Our epistemology is rooted in the fact that we believe there is a God who has spoken to us and the most fundamental things We believe we don't get from the culture.

We don't find from the Library of Congress we find in the Word of God So long as we are in this world we are informed by this inerrant and fallible word Which is given to us in Scripture so that even in the midst of this culture. We have a way of rescue and To put it in a very sophisticated way. We have a means of epistemological Rescue our knowledge.

That's what epistemology means. Our knowledge is not limited to what this culture tells us Or any culture tells us and furthermore, we do not measure the scripture by the culture. We measure any culture By the scripture, that's not an easy equation, but we must always keep it clearly in our minds.

We glorify God by honoring his word And we know that that is the very purpose of which we were created even the purpose of which we are left in a culture right now till Jesus comes The doctrine of God immediately comes in where does culture come from? God could have created us differently We won't speculate because it would be dangerous to speculate on how it might otherwise have been but let's put it this way God created his world perfectly and he made human beings social creatures and He gave us a planet filled with things that we could use and he gave us a command in Scripture You can find it in the book of Genesis whereby we are to use these things and enjoy these things. He made us Intelligent creatures in the midst of an intelligible creation He tells us that we are to be makers and builders and tillers of the soil That's all part of culture He gave us the gift of language so that we can communicate with one another and what a marvelous gift That is that he made us lingual creatures The most important reason why he gave us language is so that we can praise him But it is also a precious gift that we can speak with one another and then we understand that language can be used for good Things are for horrible things it can be used to say beautiful things or ugly things But nonetheless the gift of language is itself a beautiful thing the one who created the entire universe created human beings with the capacity indeed the absolute urgency of establishing culture the small culture that begins in the privacy of the family with Parents and children and then the larger public culture of work and discourse and industry and all the rest We're told that God not only established these cultures, but this is something very very important God established culture in variety and he revels in it How do we know that? We know that because in Acts chapter 17 Paul at Mars Hill says that God is established by his sovereignty the different ethnic The different nations not speaking of geopolitical units But of cultural units and has even given them their times and places of habitation. This is for God's glory and Furthermore we are told in the book of Revelation That when we get in the kingdom of God when we are among the B'nai Elohim before the throne of God There are going to be men and women from every tongue and tribe and people in nation Don't delude yourselves into thinking that when we get to heaven, we're gonna be speaking Esperanto Not gonna be all of a sudden

some kind of different language We may learn a new language a heavenly language But we know that we will also hear God glorified in the tongues of men and women from every single language that has ever been spoken on earth and that Tells us that God Revels in the fact that he has made his human creatures differently ethnicity race Cultural differences.

These are not things we should see as as as evidence of a fallen humanity. These are evidences of a glorious God Systematic theology also brings us immediately after the doctrine of God and creation in Providence It reminds us that God is even now ruling over all creatures and over all cultures We also have to come to that doctrine of sin and this is what we fundamentally know every single culture is fallen and we know that every single culture is hyper ambitious and Every single culture is marked by human pride. That's where the Tower of Babel instantly occurs the picture where we are told that God has forbidden the cultures from exercising their pride with the ultimate arrogance an Arrogance that led him to scatter the peoples of the earth and to confound with differences of language So even as God will be glorified when men and women from every tongue and tribe and people in nation glorify him until we're there We are left with an insurmountable problem of linguistic chaos When we're there, it's all going to make sense But right now we are left with the fact that culture is ever more complex Lest human beings be able to poison the well by concentrating all of our pride in one way with one language Just imagine how dangerous that would be We understand that pride as we understand this systematic theology understanding of culture We understand that pride becomes the explanatory factor for why culture so easily becomes an idol in itself It's because not only did God for his glory make us able to make things He created us able to build things, but we can revel in these things.

We can love these things far too much The danger comes down to this and our fallenness We create things and then We think what we have created Makes us creator And we look at this thing. We say what a beautiful thing it is And not only that we worship the things made by other people And the reality is right now in modern Western industrial civilizations for many people art is religion For many people especially in the cultural elites who would even understand such things music the artifacts of culture are the Idolaters are the idolatries they are indeed the the pagan isms of the day human pride Demonstrated in all of these various forms of idolatry, but you don't have to be in the elite To worship culture an awful lot of people with iPods hanging on their cargo shorts Are worshiping the culture if you have all those pockets, why can't you put it in it? Never mind? The doctrine of sin also reminds us that every single culture becomes a Force of seduction The fallenness That is followed by God's curse upon creation explains to us why our aesthetic Understanding is so corrupted for instance. Why our understanding of justice so corrupted Why in contemporary culture as in the cultures of old the good the beautiful and the true are severed from each other We understand in the Christian understanding the good the beautiful and the true are the same thing But just look at the average art exhibition today listen to so much music today Listen to the a tonality listen to the screeches listen and look at this this art That is an affront to sensibility a breaking of all the rules.

Yes. It's saying something. All right, and It's speaking of the fallenness of humanity, you know, the fact that in all in this we will seek to call the ugly true and the that which is Untrue beautiful Discernment means understanding that there can be no distinction between the good the beautiful and the true and that the attempt to sever these is indeed a part of the fallenness of Humanity the doctrine of humanity plays immediately in because we are made in God's image Which gives us the ability to create we form government economy industry We're able to do things such as architecture and engineering.

We're able to split the atom and send gets into outer space we are able to create an Entire complex of communication we surround ourselves 24-7 now with entertainment We understand that God making us

male and female as human beings as part of culture and this is one of the major confusions a day a Part of our responsibility as Christians is to point back to God's creational purpose that brings him glory and making us in his own image and say it was not an accident that we were made as Male and female and indeed here is a very radical statement We as Christians have to affirm that there is a different cultural role for men and women That there is a natural responsibility of women in the private culture of the family doing frankly what their men are not well equipped to do even as men have an orientation into the public culture of industry and business and government Am I saying that women should never be involved in those things?

No, that's not my purpose my purpose is to say that God has a Very important purpose for his own glory and bringing the distinctions between men and women into proper frames so that his Creational purpose can be affirmed and understood and he can be worshipped on the basis of the perfection of his plan there's a difference between men and women and of course this means there's also a purpose to sexuality and all the rest and We live in a day and we live particularly in a culture which Has settled upon sex as its primary means or a primary means of seduction We put all this together and we understand the catastrophic impact of the fall We understand the nature of pride and how this makes culture itself such a matter of of almost reflexive Idolatry and we understand the danger of acculturated Christianity and then we understand the need for rescue even as we understand Personally our sinfulness and we understand that our sinfulness cries out That there's nothing we can do for ourselves The helpless plight of the sinner can only be answered by the unilateral sovereign grace of God in Christ So also the fallenness of culture cries out that this is a problem.

There is brokenness here Where there should be justice there is injustice where there should be beauty There is ugliness where there where there should be purity. There is defilement We understand that this is not just talking about our culture and it's not certainly just talking about someone else's culture This is all human cultures are all marked by this catastrophic fallenness and the only rescue that would come is The rescue described in the book of Revelation is the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth See here is another radical statement and we're the only people who really know this and we're the only people who really believe this All this stuff's gonna burn Arguing architecture awards in heaven No one's going to carry their Pulitzer Prize with them to heaven Culture is going to pass away all of these monuments to human genius and human Aesthetic ability and all of our art and all of our music and all these things.

They're going to burn Every civilization will fall like Shelley's Ozymandias Many will fall before the Lord comes and we will simply look at the ruins and the sand But when Jesus comes And when God's will is fully consummated on that day, no one's going to be a culture critic Heaven and earth will have passed away behold all things will become new Christ the mediator Is sovereign over culture? but a part of what we have to affirm even as we worship Christ and honor What the scripture tells us about the incarnation we understand that when he humbled himself as Paul tells us in Philippians chapter 2 taking on The form of a man he also humbled himself to take on the forms of a culture Jesus learned a language Jesus spoke in a language he wore dress That communicated in his world who he was Jesus himself humbled himself Even to become a part of a human cultural system and yet he was never bound by that system He was at one in the same time Lord over that system.

That's one of the reasons why we don't worship Jesus By trying to dress as he dressed as if we could figure that out Or by trying to speak the language that he spoke as if that would make any sense in this world But by following him in obedience in the culture in which we are now embedded This is one of the

earliest challenges to the Christian Church This is one of the big questions between the Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians Do all persons have to become Jews before they can become Christians?

Just look at the Jerusalem Council that was established there No There was the clear Understanding that the gospel is now addressed to all persons in all cultures and they do not have to become any other culture in order to become the redeemed people of God sinners can come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ from any culture and frankly will remain Largely in those cultures and should become agents of the gospel in those cultures even as some will go out and Learn new languages and learn new ways to identify with those who desperately need to hear the gospel in other cultures atonement Salvation these doctrines clearly play a part where we are reminded that we are not saved from culture We are saved from sin and we are left in the world by God's sovereign design in order to be agents of the love of God and of the message of the gospel in the midst of this culture and thus no place is home for us and every place is home for us and We are to be engaged this culture in such a way that by our discernment We know where we should go or where we should not go how we should speak and how we should not speak We understand that we have a responsibility to speak to people in this culture Because we've been left here for a purpose the church While we're doing our systematic theology becomes so important because the church becomes the presence of the eternal culture amidst us It becomes in the midst of every culture a counterculture It doesn't matter where the church is found.

It is a counterculture in the midst of some other culture and Furthermore, it's a counterculture that has absolute heart Symmetry with where Christians are found in any other culture One Lord one faith one baptism many tongues many tunes many different forms of dress One Lord one faith one baptism necessarily in the midst of a fallen world The church of the redeemed people of God gathered in congregations.

That's where you're going to find the presence of the culture that is coming But it's only a hint of what is coming Because so long as we are in this world, we're still deeply embedded in our own culture We're still well, you can pretty much predict how we're going to dress. You can pretty much predict how we're going to speak so the difference is not just in What we wear and what we drive but what we say and how we live where the church Desperately needs as dr. Dever was talking about this morning Together on the basis of the Word of God to discern how we are to live in the midst of this fallen culture We're not lone rangers We are to be a part of a believing confessing church.

We're together We continually call ourselves to accountability to the Lordship of Christ and we continually call ourselves motivate each other to do right and righteous things in the midst of this culture and we continually remind ourselves of how the culture will Seduce us and we continually remind ourselves of how much we must love the people who are seduced by this culture Because love of God immediately leads to love of neighbor This also means however where we're doing our systematic theology about culture that we can't stop for eschatology It is going to burn There's going to be the end The Museum of Modern Art will not be found in heaven No one's going to be looking at what we did in heaven There's not going to be any any Artistic display in heaven of what we have done in heaven God's people are simply going to give themselves unreservedly eternally Unblinkingly to the worship of God and what he has done Nothing else will matter the consummation of all things means that God will bring all things into absolute congruence with his eternal purposes and for the absolute Manifestation of his glory throughout all of creation and heaven holds unseen That puts things in a proper perspective and Then we think about our culture this modern industrialized culture We think about our culture this 24-7 entertainment culture and think about our culture this sexually deluded and sexually obsessed culture We think about our culture We realize that

the real life living of what we do is so much influenced by this culture in ways We don't see our presuppositions our presuppositions about marriage our presuppositions about the good life our presuppositions about education our presuppositions about children These are all being shaped by the culture around us That's what we desperately need the church as Christians to gather together and say well wait just a minute How are we supposed to raise our children? Now? Wait, just a minute. What is the purpose of which we were created? Well, wait, just a minute. What should we understand about marriage? the reality is That even as culture has always been a part of the fallen human experience.

We're living in a time of tremendous trial and Even as culture has always been seductive It has probably Been unprecedented certainly it is unprecedented in human history for us to be able to have such access to culture 24-7. I Don't know whether I'm proud or embarrassed or somewhere in between to tell you that I have 12,000 songs on my iPod Yeah, I just started putting them on there Just started, you know feeding CDs to this machine I Discovered by the way, you can set it up so that when you feed the CD it automatically starts Downloading the music and then it'll spit it back out And it's sort of like having this hungry little laptop on my desk I just keep a snack of CDs and you know He's feeding in it spits them out and put in another one it spits it out And I realized I looked at this and it said I could play this I could turn the iPod on and it could play for 71 days non-stop Now I must confess to you I now realize I will die before I listen to some of the things on my iPod I'm surrounded by 24-7 entertainment you can watch anything anytime. It's all there.

We can eat just about anything We want to eat we can go just about anywhere. We want to go. We live in a circus of ideologies and a circus of worldviews And let's just be really honest.

It is so easy for us to be seduced in this culture Discernment means understanding that we are fish swimming in a giant toxic sea We're not supposed to jump out of the water One day we'll be snatched out of the water But we're supposed to swim as Christians and We're supposed to glorify God and all that we do Love of God means that we are to engage the culture for his glory Love of God means that we need to engage the culture for gospel witness So what about the arts and music and architecture and education and all these things? Should a Christian become an architect? Yeah for the glory of God schoolteacher for the glory of God Chemical engineer for the glory of God so I'm gonna figure out how that's done It's beyond my understanding But I know you can be a chemical engineer for the glory of God In all seriousness we live in a society in which there are so many different needs and so many different complex vocation so many different things and and I understand that there right now many of you are making some of these big decision saying what is it that I should discern? About the will of God for my life. Just remember this the most important things about the will of God. You already know Scripture is already revealed to you Almost everything you need to know about the will of God for your life But wherever you go and whatever you do understand this you're never going to jump out of the culture The culture is always going to be there like some kind of vortex pulling you in You're gonna desperately need the people of God wherever you are right now Whether you're in college or wherever I encourage you with everything within me to be deeply involved in a local Congregation where you are a member Under the teaching of God's Word and where you are in the company of fellow Christians who take these questions Seriously and try to show the glory of God in every dimension of life the reality is That even as culture is all around us and we can't jump out of it Christians are called to have discernment to be able to step back from it and it's not because we're smarter than everyone else It's because by the Word of God we have the speaking God telling us what we need to know We as Christians need detox from time to time Some things what this conference is all about new attitude.

That's what the Lord's Day is all about detox We come in with all the poisons that we've been picking up all the toxins All the seductions all the temptations all the false ideas all the very attractive Ideologies all the cultural experiences and we come to church and in the midst of God's people confronted by the Word of God The toxicity becomes clear and by the Holy Spirit applying God's Word to our lives We are sanctified Not gonna be done until Jesus comes But until Jesus comes We're to be discerning Christians in the midst of a fallen culture. You pray with me Our father we thank you for giving us your word without which we would not know where to begin much less where to end We pray that your people will be found faithful and We confess that the only faithfulness That will come as a faithfulness that you give to your church father strengthen your people by your word bind us in your church together May we be faithful witnesses of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ Even as we look forward to that day when time will be no more and We will join those from every tongue and tribe and people in nation to declare your glory We pray this in Jesus name till Jesus comes. Amen You You've been listening message by al moeller which was given at our new attitude 2007 conference and has been made available to you through sovereign grace ministries Sovereign grace is primarily devoted to planning and caring for churches We also hold conferences train leaders and publish books music and audio and video messages for more information visit www.sovereigngraceministries.org Or call us at 301 330 7400

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