Lingual-Cultural Contexts; "American" Culture

One of the purposes of these lectures is to help us see and think about the interrelationship of mission studies with all disciplines and all other academic disciplines. We can see how mission studies relates to these disciplines and vice versa. For this lesson, Dr. David Chapman from the New Testament department is here to speak with us about the Bible and the New Testament in particular. He will talk about multiple cultures and missions issues, and he will bring his expertise and missions passion to bear in being with us today. Dr. Chapman, we welcome you and thank you for being here.

(Dr. Chapman)

Today I would like to speak with you about the New Testament, culture, and missions, and I have two important points. The first is simply that to interpret and apply the New Testament well, we must think cross-culturally. The second point is that to interpret and apply the New Testament well, we must comprehend its multicultural missionary task.

The first point has a lot to do with culture, communication, and interpretation. You may not realize this because we live with it daily, but culture has a great effect on our ability to interpret, apply Scripture, and communicate in general. For instance, I could say the following sentence to you, "Dr. Nelson Jennings was seen yesterday in Starbucks with Madonna." That has a certain feel and meaning to you. You know Dr. Nelson Jennings as part of your cultural heritage. You also know what a Starbucks is, and you know who Madonna is and what that means. Probably that sentence has a certain negative connotation, and you might wonder what Dr. Jennings was doing with Madonna in Starbucks! A lot of that has to do with the whole nature of culture and communication. For instance, if we were to have a dialogue, we would interact back and forth. Behind all of that is our common culture, which enables communication to occur. In the sense that when I say Nelson Jennings, you know to whom I refer. When I say Starbucks, you know I am talking about a coffeehouse. And when I say Madonna, you know I am talking about a rather flamboyant singer. All of that enables the sentence that I said to be communicated to you.

The same thing that is true in our culture was also true in the culture in which the New Testament arose. I could change the members of this sentence to Paul and the Corinthians. As soon as I do that, we instantly recognize that the cultural background in which communication occurred between Paul and the church at Corinth is shifted. Their culture is different than ours. They have never heard of Starbucks. They probably and thankfully have never heard of Madonna. But there may be aspects of their culture that we are less familiar with as well. For instance, an ideal is the city treasurer. When Paul refers to such an individual in Romans, saying that that individual lived in Corinth, that is part of their culture. They knew instantly what that meant. It meant that he was wealthy, that he probably funded a lot of the building projects that occurred in the city of Corinth, that he had a leadership position in the city that was probably second or third tier. He was a well-respected public figure in the church at Corinth. They knew that instantly, but we have to learn it secondhand.

The nature of the New Testament background is part Greco-Roman culture and in part Jewish culture. We tend to separate the two, but there is really a lot of relationship between them. If you read Jewish sources from this period, you would know that very often they use Greco-Roman terminology, and they speak in typical Greco-Roman ways. Judaism is not that distinct from the Greco-Roman culture, but there are some peculiarities to Judaism that were not true in Greco-Roman culture more broadly. We can speak of backgrounds in at least those two different ways. If we start with that, then we have to

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recognize that to fully appreciate what the author says we must understand his culture. The radicalness of that rarely grips us. This is partly because we like to see the New Testament as a book that was written not by someone who visited Athens, Greece, but someone who is from some place down the road.

I remember seeing a skit once that was supposed to be amusing, so people were being somewhat sarcastic. It involved a number of people singing the chorus, "If the King James was good enough for John the Baptist, it is good enough for me." We instantly laugh at that. The next chorus was "If the King James was good enough for Peter and Paul, it is good enough for me." We recognize that they did not have the King James Version of the Bible in those days. They spoke Greek. We do not speak Greek. We realize instantly that John the Baptist ministered in a cultural context that is very different from the translators of the King James and very different from the English context in which we read the Bible today. There is a huge difference there.

The question we need to ask is if these differences prevent us from being able to understand the New Testament. The initial answer is both yes and no, but I would like to add some sophistication to that. I want us to look at our culture and theirs. We will discuss similarities and differences of each.

You probably know enough about the Greek culture to be able to speak to at least a few similarities with American culture. If you lived in ancient Rome and suddenly shifted to modern-day United States, there might be a few points of contact that you have culturally. There are a variety of sexual practices, including prostitution, that exist in both societies. I read an article yesterday that there are a variety of sexual pagan cults arising where sexuality is seen as a means to God. It was that way in the ancient culture, and people are intentionally trying to revive that. There are factions in the church in both cultures. There are a lot of similarities in our economic and monetary systems. That extends to Rome as a world power, the nature of trade, and the nature of moving a lot of product around. There is an emphasis on knowledge in both cultures. The Greeks were very concerned with knowledge, and they were very sophisticated in that regard. Philosophy is one example of that in that a lot of what you learn today in modern philosophy was thought 2000 or more years ago by Greek philosophers. We are familiar with Plato and Aristotle. The Gregorians, Stoics, and Epicureans still have philosophies that continue today.

There is a fascination with sports and violence in both cultures. The sports in the ancient world were more violent than ours are today. Our fascination with violence is in part connected with our fascination with sports, but we especially see it in movies and popular culture. Rome was an extremely violent culture, including things like gladiators. We had a movie of the gladiators that did very well at the box office. It had a romantic storyline in it, but a lot of people went to see someone get mauled by a lion. The nice thing is that we can say to ourselves that it is just Hollywood, and it is not real. But there is a sense in which we are similarly fascinated with violence. There are socioeconomic and other classes of people in both societies. The idea of a socially and economically stratified society is still true today. Religious pluralism is common in both societies, which is something that has long been true of American culturalism and is especially obvious today. It was very obvious back in the first century.

Ancient culture was very modern in some regards. They had running water and a sewer system. They had split-level homes and a high level of agricultural development. They ran water lines for miles to get water from one water source to two or three cities. They had interest in literary culture and theatre. They had extensive libraries with a reasonable level of literacy. That literacy was probably lost during the Middle Ages and only recouped by the late Renaissance. The Greeks were extremely concerned with education, especially of certain classes. They were also constantly concern in the Roman Empire over

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wars abroad. There was a sense in which their military held the peace, but people were always concerned about whether it was adequate or not. There were the Olympics, an international emphasis on sports. There was racism back then, just as there is today. There was a strong central government that promised peace.

There are two other things that I consider very important. In their culture, human nature was the same as ours is today. Men and women created in the image of God are fallen and sinful. The image is twisted, and it needs to be redeemed. The second thing is that God was the same. All of these similarities, especially these two I just mentioned, allow us to communicate cross-culturally with the New Testament and read it as if it were our own book. This is why you can translate the Bible into any language, and it will speak to the hearts and needs of people. They may not understand all of the cultural references, but the big picture communicates cross-culturally.

If we were to refine our understanding of the New or Old Testament, we would also have to think of the dissimilarities. Let us talk about some things that are different from their world and our world. Language is a big difference, as those of you who have studied Greek know. Languages have remarkable similarities, but their differences are enough to be noted as well. Technology was extremely different, including medicine, computers, and information flow. We can sometimes think that we are in a more privileged state than we are, though. The system of government was different, though they both have the idea of a strong central authority. By the time of the first century, the emperor was largely in control. The central authority then was basically a dictatorship whereas we have more of a democratic system today. The pace of life is different today, even though it varies, depending on where you are in America. If you are in the inner city or in the countryside, pace of life can change, and that was true back then as well. In general, the pace of life today is a little more frantic. There was more group identity in ancient Rome, though a lot of the Greek and Roman philosophies were very individualistic. Social practices and values, including the worship of idols, are different today.

The role of women was different in ancient Rome, though by the first century in the upper classes, women were extremely educated and very involved in the culture. There were some different views than we have today, and as you moved down into the lower classes, the education level of women was much lower than the men. Slavery is something that we have had recently in American history, but it was still ongoing in the first century. Thankfully it does not take place in America anymore today. Palestine lived in a constant fear of rebellion. I do not think we actually have a constant fear that people will rebel within the United States, though we do fear wars on the periphery of the United States. The rulers in the provinces of the Roman Empire were cruel, and corruption was extremely evident. Thankfully these are problems that we do not face to the same degree today. The central power maintained control throughout the Roman Empire largely by might, whereas that is not exactly the same way that the central power maintains control in the United States. It was a different land, and the very nature of Palestine or the Mediterranean basin has a different feel than if you walked out in Missouri today and saw the lush green grass. The flow of information is different. There is a strong Jew-Gentile distinction that would have been felt both by the pagan person and by the Jewish person. There was a strong system of patronage where if you were my client I was responsible as your patron to provide for your financial welfare. You, in reciprocal relationship, would have to buoy up my image within society and speak very well of me. There are some similarities today, but there is not an ongoing system of patronage in the current world.

Probably the most important distinction was the nature of the church and society in the first century. Churches as a whole had not been established for more than a decade or two by the time of the writing of the New Testament. We think of the church as something that has been around for hundreds and thousands of years. It is well established in American society. Even if certain denominations have major

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struggles and give in to secularism and give up their theology, on the whole we do not feel like the situation of the church in the United States is at all tenuous. It really was tenuous in the first century. Those are some of the dissimilarities.

Having stated all of that, the simple point can be made that similarities make it easy to understand the New Testament, while differences complicate the task of interpretation. Part of your job as students of Scripture is to get to know that culture so well that as you interpret the New Testament you can interpret it within the framework in which it was written. We need to recognize that we interact with it as a group that is a separate culture. We often think of the person in Aryangia reading the New Testament and wonder how they could understand in such a different culture. We partake of that same difference and also have the same similarities with New Testament culture. The book that we have before us, called the New Testament, is a missionary document. It is a cross-cultural document that we have to view as written in a different time but with cross-cultural things that have implications for us today. The first point is that to interpret and apply the New Testament well, we must think cross-culturally. Your missions class will help you to interpret the New Testament better, because you will become more sensitive to issues of culture.

If you go to Aryangia, it might seem easy to relate to it cross-culturally, because you can study the culture. But some have asked if there is sufficient evidence from the first century that we know what the New Testament culture was like. There are actually hordes of evidence, but we do not read it anymore, because it does not show up in our elementary, junior high, or high school curriculum. All you need to do is go to the section of Greek and Roman literature in your local library. There are entire series of Greek and Latin works that let us know a lot about Greco-Roman antiquity. From the Jewish perspective, we have Josephus, Philo, and the rabbinic literature. We also have the pseudepigrapha and the apocrypha. There are a lot of Jewish writings available. There is Cumron literature, found from the Dead Sea. There are varieties of people who have tried to synthesize this. If you want to study these things more, I would recommend Everett Ferguson's book called *The Backgrounds of Earliest Christianity*. There is also another dozen resources that you could go to that have tried to synthesize this literature for you. That is a great place to start, but it is also good to go to the original sources themselves. You could read some of Josephus, Philo, or other first-century or second-century writers who tell us what the culture was like. You get a better feel for it even than someone else describing it for you.

Some have also said that it is easier for us to understand the culture in Aryangia than it is to understand our own culture. We are so immersed in it that we do not have the ability to distance ourselves from it and realize what is part and parcel of our culture. A lot of people interact culturally with how to understand our own culture. One of the great things about doing missions work is you end up in a different culture. You come back into your culture, and you are suddenly an alien in your own land. You have to start sorting out what the culture is in your own country as well. One of the benefits of that is that you can interpret your New Testament better. You understand your culture better—and cultural differences better as well. There are better motivations for going into missions, but that is one of the results.

Let me move on to the second major point, which is to interpret and apply the New Testament well, we must comprehend its multicultural missionary task. The New Testament was consciously a missionary document, written by missionaries to people in a whole variety and host of cultures. We do not often think of it in that way. We are so familiar with it that it is almost like Joe down the street wrote it. In reality, it was written into different cultures with the goal of producing missions and good missionary interaction. I have five examples of this that contribute to my thesis. The first is that the language of the

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New Testament was Greek. In the day, that was the *lingua franca* of the whole Mediterranean world. Everybody spoke Greek. What is peculiar about this is that many of the people who wrote the New Testament probably knew Aramaic or Hebrew, but they did not write in Aramaic or Hebrew. It is possible that Matthew did initially write in Aramaic, but the early church fathers tell us that Matthew originally wrote in Aramaic and then wrote it into Greek. He probably did this because he was concerned with the spread of the Gospel throughout the Greek-speaking world. He wanted as many people to understand it as possible. There is some evidence that the New Testament was a multicultural missionary book.

The second point is about the recipients of the New Testament. There are many different ethnic groups and regions represented in the New Testament. James probably wrote to a largely Jewish audience. He says in James 1:1, "James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings." He probably wrote to a Jewish set of people. Hebrews was probably written to a largely Hellenistic Jewish audience. This would be a group of Jewish people who were very influenced by Hellenism in their day. They lived outside of Palestine and were influenced by Greek culture. First Peter was written to churches in Asia Minor. He lists them as "those who reside as aliens scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." Those are all regions throughout Asia Minor. He consciously wrote to a variety of people in churches spread throughout areas that had undergone missionary activity in the early church. The book of Revelation is written to seven churches in Asia Minor. Paul wrote epistles to people who lived in Asia Minor (Ephesians, Colossians, Galatians), to people who lived in Greece (Philippians, Thessalonians, Corinthians), and to people who lived in Rome (Romans). That is self-evident, and you probably know that. Obviously that makes the set of writings we call the New Testament based in a variety of cultural situations, and it makes them missionary documents. The documents of the New Testament were written to different classes in society. The book of Philemon was written to someone who had probably quite a lot of property and money. He certainly owned slaves, as we know from the issue with Onesimus. Luke wrote to Theophilus, the recipient of both Luke and Acts. This was probably a man of some means who contributed to the writing of the book. You can consider Corinth, where we have the house of Aquila and Priscilla, who are merchants and householders. But we also have synagogue rulers, slaves, and widows all written to by Paul in Corinth. He wrote to different classes in the society. The very recipients of the New Testament show that it is a multicultural missionary book.

The missionary activity of Jesus also shows that Jesus Himself thought in terms of multicultural missions. In Matthew 15:21, Jesus encounters the Canaanite women, and He says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," yet she is still able to entreat Him to heal her daughter. He willingly ascents to heal her because though He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, His missionary activity was not limited to the house of Israel. We see that He has compassion on Gentiles. Among Jewish people He broke with the legal stipulations that forbade table fellowship. He ministered to all classes within a very class-conscious society. He ministered to the Samaritan woman in John 4. In Matthew 8, Jesus heals the son of a centurion, who was probably a God-fearer, possibly even on his way to becoming a proselyte to ancient Judaism, but nonetheless a Gentile. In the Great Commission, He directs His disciples to go make disciples of all nations. Jesus saw His task as a multicultural missionary task targeted to a group of Israelites but ultimately to spread the mission of the Gospel throughout the whole world.

We can also see this in the missionary activity of the apostles. It took them a while to recognize the ramifications of Acts 1:8, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest parts of the earth." That is a worldwide missionary task. Though it took them a while to recognize those ramifications, it is

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possible nonetheless to read this as somewhat of a structure for the book of Acts. It shows that the apostles did catch on, and they began to see their task as a multicultural missionary task. This certainly affects how we view the New Testament. They wrote these books as part of that mission.

Finally, the way that the apostles engaged their culture was in a mindset of missionary engagement with culture. They contextualized the Gospel to the culture and called people to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. We see the intriguing paradigm in terms of Acts 17 in Paul's address in Athens. In this message, he cites Greco-Roman poetry, and he notes inscriptions on idols. He engages with the culture, and he has read the culture. He knows the culture, and he is able to use the culture as a launching point from which to speak the Gospel into that culture. This shows that he is very familiar with Greek culture and has engaged with it carefully over long periods of time.

Paul critiques Greek culture as well, such as when he instructs people not to become slaves in 1 Corinthians 7:23, saying, "You were bought with a price. Do not become slaves of men." To us, where we do not have slavery in society, that does not mean very much. We think that is a good idea—to not become slaves. But in the ancient culture, that was a major means of social advancement. If you were born in the lower classes of the society, you did not have Roman citizenship. One of the best ways to gain it for you, and especially for your children, was to sell yourself into slavery. This was typically for a limited period of time, seven years, after which time the slave owner would give you your freedom. Your status would be officially in the culture recognized as that of a freedman. You would become a client of your former slave owner, who would then be your patron. He would see your way financially through the society. In that way, you would raise yourself economically, and ultimately by having become a freedman you become that much closer to becoming a Roman citizen. And your children have much more of a possibility of becoming a Roman citizen. When Paul says to people in the ancient world, "Do not become a slave," he says not to do what many people in society were doing. He critiques this aspect of society, because he wants us to hold Christ as our one Lord and master.

I would add that as they engaged with culture, they also critiqued it from the standpoint of maintaining biblical authority. Note how often when Paul writes to Gentile cities he quotes Scripture. That is somewhat surprising if you think of it. He interacts with people from a different culture who have some contact with Scripture, but he could much more easily argue from the standpoint of Platonic philosophy. They would have been much more familiar with that. But instead he states Scripture as his basis for authority, and he uses the Gospel to critique culture and applaud aspects of the culture that he approves of. In that regard we have to understand the New Testament as a multicultural missionary book.

I would like to leave you with five theses. You can think of these as both statements about how the New Testament authors conducted missions and strong suggestions or principles from which we need to govern our missionary task as well. The first one is that the New Testament authors hold firmly to the revealed truth in Jesus and in the Old Testament. We too need to hold fast to the revealed truth of Scripture and not let culture overwhelm that.

Second, the New Testament books are contextualized to the situations of the recipients. Paul was very happy to use the language of Greco-Roman rhetoric in his day to make sure that people to whom he wrote understood what he communicated. He used aspects of the culture, critiqued it, brought it in, and encouraged it. All of these things were part of contextualizing the New Testament to the situations of the recipients. Third, the situations of the recipients vary from book to book in the New Testament. We often think of the New Testament culture as if it were a whole entity. If I am right, that the very recipients of the New Testament were so broad to show that this was a multicultural missionary task, then we also need to begin to distinguish between the different cultures in the books. For instance, the

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recipients of James had a different culture than those of 1 Corinthians. As we do missions ourselves, we need to react to cultures as they are in and of themselves. We need to prepare to be multicultural instead of just impose a single culture on other people.

Fourth, the New Testament is written into situations in which the churches, saved by the grace of God, could easily perish in a generation or less. That speaks more to the average missionary culture than it does to the New Testament. The person in Aryangia, who looks around and sees three or four other Christians who make up the whole of the church in that tribe, experiences the New Testament closer to his own situation than we do to ours.

Finally, the New Testament is essentially a collection of missionary writings. I have already argued that. Our problem is probably that we limit missions to evangelism and setting up a church. Missionaries, whom we call apostles, wrote almost all the New Testament books. They are written to a church that he or an immediate follower of that missionary founded in a variety of contexts that he is trying to further establish. This speaks to the nature of missions. We do not just go in and do evangelism. We need to make sure that those churches are well founded for generations yet to come. In conclusion, I have tried to establish two points: to interpret and apply the New Testament well, we must think cross-culturally. We must also comprehend its multicultural missionary task.

Most people have never thought of interacting with the New Testament as if it were an alien landscape. One of the best reasons to learn Greek is that every time you open your Greek New Testament, you are suddenly confronted with the fact that the New Testament is from a different culture. We need to be careful, therefore, not to just count too much on the similarities to allow us to interpret every word of Scripture correctly. We also have to be conscious of the dissimilarities.

The task of the missionary is even more complex than we might imagine. The New Testament is in one culture, and we want to bring that Gospel into the culture that we go into. But we were raised in a third culture in the United States, or wherever we are from. We cannot help but be affected by our cultural understanding of the New Testament, so it is a very complex task. It is a task, though, that is very similar to that of Paul himself. He tried to bring a cross-cultural missionary Gospel as a Jewish person who was also raised within the context of Hellenism into worlds such as Asia Minor, Corinth, Greece, Rome, and Italy. These have even different cultures from what he was used to. Much as the missionary does today, he tried to find that part of Old Testament Scripture and the teaching of Jesus that critiqued the culture as well as what needed to be conveyed within that culture. Our task is very similar to that of the apostle Paul in that regard.

Some have asked how we can start thinking of the New Testament cross-culturally and interpret it more accurately. I think that one of the things that we as Americans have great struggles with is that we have devalued the study of history. We really have to see part of our role as Christians as understanding the cultures of the Old and New Testament better. We can do so by reading books by other people and reading literature from that time. We would do well to meditate further on the similarities and dissimilarities of the cultures that we mentioned earlier. If we thought about it longer, there are probably endless lists of similarities as well as differences. That is something that we can contemplate. Practically, when you come to a passage and you are about to interpret it, you wonder what cultural things come to bear. That is where we are somewhat at the behest of what we have heard in the past from preachers who have brought culture into the pulpit. And we also have to look at commentaries and books where people have sought to immerse themselves in the first-century culture and bring it to bear in the interpretation of the book. There you are after what the best commentaries are. Those are some of the things that we have to do. Very often in evangelical Christianity, there is a movement to say, "Thou

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shalt not use a commentary." It is just you and your Bible, and that is sufficient. That is true insofar as our cultures are similar. There is that immediate point of contact. The new Christian who just has a Bible can learn the Gospel and its implications for his or her life. But as we want to refine our knowledge even more, we are thrust into studying outside of just what we know in our own brain and can encounter in our own Bible. We have to look to some other resources.

Thank you.

(Dr. Jennings)

Let us move on to topic 10 on American culture. As Dr. Chapman mentioned in approaching the New Testament, it is very important in understanding the culture of the New Testament to understand one's own culture. Perhaps the most difficult culture for anyone to understand is his or her own culture. This is because you are immersed in your own culture. Without cross-cultural experience, you have little point of comparison. That makes understanding of one's own culture all the more difficult and challenging. Understanding your own culture is very important in understanding the New Testament and being about the whole cross-cultural missionary task.

In thinking about the term "American," it is a slippery term. Someone who is a citizen of the country of Brazil is an American. People from Canada especially often times resent people from the United States referring to themselves exclusively as Americans. That is a common use of the term, and the last few days the phrase that has come to be used in the media about the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have been called an attack on America. The terms "America" and "Americans" generally are used in reference to the United States. Given that qualification, we also know that when you speak of Americans or U.S. citizens, you speak ethnically about a wide variety of people. There is a commonality to U.S. Americans, but there are ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences that go into "American culture." It is impossible to speak of a monolithic American culture. You have cultural icons like Madonna or Michael Jackson. And you have cultural traditions and symbols like the Statue of Liberty and the American flag. There is overlap with politics, which we will talk about in a little bit. These are introductory remarks to point out that we have to be a little bit careful to qualify our terms when we talk about Americans and American culture.

Last meeting time we spoke of the topic of culture. Let me speak a little further to that as we move further into this topic. I hear two overlapping but often times blurred and confused uses of the term culture in evangelical circles. First of all, I hear much talk about engaging and affecting the culture with the Gospel. That term seems to be in reference to the general surroundings in which we find ourselves. This includes habits, practices, thought patterns, and beliefs. Especially when you talk specifically in missiological terms, the second use of culture comes to the fore. That is of cultures (plural) throughout the world. That use of cultures means language, customs, traditions, socioeconomic structures, family patterns, and political setup. You see the two differences. There are multiple cultures throughout the world, and language and ethnicity often times can be the most representative symbols of different cultures. The way that evangelicals use the term culture is more about the general surrounding. We talk about it in a monolithic, uniform way. I would encourage us to be aware of that to help us realize what it is we talk about.

In talking about American culture in this setting today, I want to talk about ethnicity and one culture among many. Some of the readings we will discuss talks about Americans as people in the sense of having a self-understanding of who you are ethnically and by custom and tradition. This includes the categories of our individualism and being a-cultural in our self-understanding. Many of us do not

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understand that we have a particular cultural setting and ethnicity or that we operate within subgroups. For many of us who are in an ethnic and linguistic majority situation, we do not realize that we have a culture. Therefore we have an a-cultural notion of ourselves. As we will get to later on, we have an a-cultural sense of the Gospel. We do not realize how much the Gospel deals with ethnic belonging and location. The Gospel is for all of the nations.

There are values and assumptions that Americans have such as the free and self-reliant individual, privacy, equality, informality, and the goodness of humanity. That sort of thing is shattered and threatened by events such as have occurred in our recent history. We also have a specific view of the importance of time, communicative style in various groups, and the ways of reasoning and talking about a problem. I have heard others who are not Americans speak of the positive value of Americans being able to get to a point in a discussion about a problem. Often times this is done with humor. For example, I have a Scottish friend who is in a multinational insurance business. He said that in a discussion that emerges, it is often times the Americans who will see right to what the problem is. The American will crystallize what the problem is, what we need to do about it, and how to solve it. The problem-solving capacity and urge and getting right to the point is part of an American communicative style.

In light of the wealth of the United States, some have asked if there is resentment about wealth being built on the back of oppressed peoples. One can certainly see that in the general backlash of the whole last generation. Many people have recognized, identified, and pointed fingers at the Western world for having ripped wealth away from much of the non-Western world. Some have said that the United States in particular has unfair relationships with and has suppressed Native Americans and first nation peoples in this part of the world. Certainly many would have the posture that the current wealth has been gained at the expense of other peoples. One could see resentment among some because of the position of comfort and power economically and militarily. Many are opposed to liberal capitalism theologically and in the way society develops in connection with the place of the United States.

It is interesting to me to note that, in light of the terrorist attacks and the media's attempts at categorizing and communicating the realities of what has happened, on the one hand you have individualism about who many Americans are. But you also have a corporate reaction and corporate pain that is extremely real. That illustrates that as human beings, while a particular characteristic of being American could be having a strong individualism, the corporate reality of who we are as human beings will not go away. Individualism is not unique to Americans, but it certainly is a particular trait. The corporate reality of one's national affiliation and nationhood has been affected by what has happened. You will also note that comments are made that this has been an attack on all freedom-loving people. The media have said that it is an attack on freedom and democracy. I realize that we are all very sensitive now, and I do not necessarily want to debate that. I am one who is for democracy and freedom. The place of liberal capitalism is related to but not the same as democracy and political freedom. But in conjecturing about what it was that partially provoked such a well-planned, horrific, and violent attack that has taken place, liberal capitalism is part of what many people resent and dislike about the United States of America and all that it represents. We need to self-evaluate who we are as the United States and our entanglement with and root relationship with liberal capitalism. I do not mean to say that in a critical way but in a way of analysis. That part of the United States is very real in how it is perceived. Liberal capitalism has cultivated an environment wherein inappropriate television shows are most popular, and that is part of what is resented by peoples outside the United States.

We will continue this topic, but let me also give you a question to think about for next time. What are some of the attitudes toward other religions that Christians have had and still do have? That is a vague

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question, but it gives some guidance in preparing for our next lesson. God bless you, God comfort you, God lead you, and we will see you next time.

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