RESISTING CULTURAL PRESSURE WITHOUT COMPROMISING

Romans 12:2

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2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. ***Romans 12:2***

Culture is the shared set of beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, arts, and institutions that characterize a group of people and are passed down through generations. In plain term, culture is the way of life of a group of people. As a church (the *Ecklessia* of God), we have our culture.

Culture constantly exerts a subtle or overt pressure to conform—shifting morals, redefining truth, and demanding allegiance to popular trends.

- **The Babylonian Strategy:** As seen in **Daniel 1**, King Nebuchadnezzar did not just conquer Jerusalem with swords; he tried to conquer the minds of exiled young men through **cultural assimilation**—changing their food, education, names, and worldview to make them forget who they were.
- **The Modern Parallel:** Today's culture tries to reshape how we think about identity, honesty, relationships, and authority. Compromise happens quietly when we weaken biblical convictions to avoid standing out or facing rejection.

A Christian may wear a cross or be known in the community as a follower of Jesus, yet also bear bodily markings believed to offer protection. When asked why, the person replies, *"I just wanted to make sure that all the bases were covered."*

This anecdote introduces a critical issue facing Christians everywhere: the subtle yet dangerous influence of ungodly culture on genuine faith. The apostle Paul addressed this very problem in his letter to the Colossians.

The Danger of Human Traditions

Paul's warnings to the Colossian believers are striking in their urgency. Despite describing them as *"saints and faithful brothers"* who possessed genuine *"faith in Christ Jesus"* (***Colossians 1:2***, ***4***), he repeatedly cautioned them against spiritual danger. Four times he issued stern warnings: *"Let no one deceive you"* (2:4); *"See to it that no one takes you captive"* (2:8); *"Let no one pass judgement on you"* (2:16); and, *"Let no one disqualify you"* (2:18).

The threats came from *"philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental*

spirits of the world" (***Colossians 2:8***). In Phrygia, the Colossians lived amid a blend of Roman, Greek, Jewish, and local religious traditions. Archaeological evidence illustrates this setting: protective amulets, curse tablets seeking vengeance, papyri with prayers to angels, and consultations with people claiming ecstatic visions.

These practices were driven by fear—fear of capricious spirits and deities that supposedly controlled daily life. Magic was common, not the fictional variety of children's stories, but real attempts to summon spiritual powers for protection or advantage. For the Colossians, this was simply the air they breathed, the culture they had inherited from parents and grandparents.

No Culture is Neutral

To understand culture, we must recognise how shared customs, values, and worldviews shape a group's thinking and behaviour. Every culture remains ungodly and wicked insofar as the gospel has not transformed it.

Since Adam's fall, humanity has lived in darkness unless brought into the light. Scripture describes us as *"by nature children of wrath"* (***Ephesians 2:3***), estranged from God and hostile in mind. Every culture untouched by the gospel therefore reflects humanity's fallen condition, regardless of ethnicity or location. This does not mean every cultural practice is wrong. Rather, we must examine its foundations and discern how to respond.

For African Christians, specific challenges arise when Christianity is dismissed as *"white man's religion"* or the Bible as a *"Western book."* Scripture is God's authoritative word over all mankind, transcending culture and ethnicity. The temptation to embrace African traditional religion, witchcraft, or ancestral worship as markers of authentic African identity must be tested against biblical truth.

As one Zambian Christian observes, many African believers face a dilemma: rejecting overt paganism while clinging to cultural practices born of false religions—bridal price rituals laced with superstition, distorted teachings on sexuality (female circumcision and the likes), and fear-driven interpretations of misfortune. These are not mere customs but theological declarations that contradict Christian faith.

Western culture presents different temptations: radical individualism, materialism, and self-sufficiency that denies our need for community or help. The English saying—*"an Englishman's home is his castle"*—epitomises this isolating worldview. African *ubuntu*—the principle that it takes a village to raise a child—offers a helpful corrective, but only when that village consists of believers committed to biblical truth.

Culture – Its Origin

When asked why we follow certain practices, we often struggle to give a clear answer beyond, *"This is how our ancestors did it."* Sometimes, we fear

questioning the status quo because we do not want to anger our leaders, ancestors, or the gods. Yet we should ask: Why must we kneel or close our eyes during prayer? Is this required by Scripture? Does keeping my eyes open make me a witch, the devil, or disobedient?

The Concrete Slab

There was an army barracks that always had on its duty roster 4 soldiers to guard a concrete slab in front of the barracks. The soldiers changed shifts guarding the slabs for many years.

Different commanders came and went, and the tradition continued. After many years, a new commander was assigned to the barracks. Amongst the things he did was asking why things were done the way they were. When he asked why soldiers were guarding the slab, he was told, *"We've always done it this way. It's our tradition. Our former commanders instructed us to do that."*

The commander was adamant on finding out why. He went to the archives to look for answers, and he came across a document that had the explanation. The document was very old. It had instructions written by one of the retired commanders who had even passed away. The new commander learnt that over 80 years ago, the barracks wanted to build a platform where events could be performed. When the concrete slab was laid, wild animals walked over it at night before the slab would dry. The soldiers would fix it the next morning, but when evening came the same thing would happen. So, the commander ordered that 4 soldiers should guard the concrete slab for 3 weeks to allow it to dry. The following week the commander was transferred to another post, and a new commander was brought in. The new commander found the routine and enforced it and every commander that followed him did the same.

Eighty years later the barracks continued guarding a concrete slab. The new commander, armed with this newfound knowledge, decided that it was time to break free from the shackles of a decades-old tradition that had lost its relevance. He called for a meeting with the soldiers and explained the history behind the concrete slab, highlighting that it was a temporary measure meant to address a specific problem during the construction phase. He emphasized the importance of adapting to the changing times and the need to reevaluate traditions that no longer served a purpose. The soldiers, initially resistant to change, started to see the logic behind the commander's words. However, breaking an 80-year-old tradition wouldn't be easy.

To ease the transition, the commander proposed a collaborative effort to repurpose the area. Instead of guarding the slab, he suggested transforming it into a space that could be utilized by the soldiers for various activities. The idea resonated with the troops, and they began brainstorming ways to turn the concrete slab into a recreational area, perhaps a gathering spot for camaraderie and team-

building activities. The soldiers took charge of the transformation, utilizing their skills to create benches, a small stage, and even a makeshift basketball hoop. As the barracks underwent this unexpected metamorphosis, a sense of unity and purpose filled the air. The soldiers realized that they were not just breaking free from an outdated tradition; they were building something new and meaningful in its place.

The news of the transformation spread throughout the military community, garnering attention from higher-ups who admired the commander's innovative approach. The once mundane concrete slab became a symbol of adaptability and progress, a testament to the power of questioning long-standing practices.

Resisting Cultural Pressure

Christian's resist being shaped by culture by renewing their minds through Scripture, setting their hearts on Christ, and living under His lordship rather than the world's pressure.

1) **Culture Is Always Discipling Us -** Culture is not neutral. It catechizes. It teaches. It trains. It normalizes assumptions. It tells us what matters, what success looks like, what happiness requires, and what truth should feel like. Paul does not say, *"Be careful not to be overly influenced."* He says, *"Do not be conformed."*
2) **Resistance Begins with a Renewed Mind -** Paul's answer is not political power, cultural withdrawal, or outrage—it is the renewal of the mind. A renewed mind thinks biblically, evaluates claims carefully, recognizes false assumptions, and submits to God's revealed truth. You cannot resist cultural pressure if your thinking is continually shaped by unfiltered media, trends over truth, and feelings over facts. Renewal happens as the Word of God reshapes how we see God, ourselves, and the world.
3) **Set Your Heart on Christ, Not the World – *Colossians 3:1–4*** calls believers to set their minds on things above—where Christ is—rather than on earthly things. This does not mean ignoring daily life. It means reordering life around Christ as central. When Christ is central, culture loses its power, approval loses its grip, and fear loses its authority. **Discernment flows from devotion.**
4) **Faithful Resistance Is Steady, Not Reactive –** Resisting culture does not mean reacting to everything loudly. It means steady obedience, quiet faithfulness, clear convictions, and humble courage. The goal is not to win cultural arguments. The goal is to remain faithful to Christ. Faithfulness may look unimpressive to the world, but it is precious in the sight of God.
5) **Walking in Christ Daily -** Paul's ultimate exhortation is simple yet profound: *"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up*

in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (***Colossians 2:6–7***). This walking in Christ must occur daily and all year round. It means continually trusting him for salvation and security while following and submitting to his lordship. We must "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (***Colossians 3:1***), adopting a radically new worldview shaped by heavenly standards rather than earthly values.

In Christ, *"there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all"* (***Colossians 3:11***). Our primary identity isn't ethnic, tribal, or national—it's being in Christ. We have more in common with believers across the world than with unsaved family members who share our language and customs.

Conclusion

This allegiance to Christ shapes everything: how we think, spend money, marry, raise children, face tragedy, and contemplate tomorrow. God's word alone—not culture—must determine these matters. The cost may be high, including rejection by family and exclusion from cultural ceremonies, but as Jesus warned, *"A person's enemies will be those of his own household"* (***Matthew 10:36***).