



*The Podcast Focused on
Revitalizing Conventional Christianity
—One Person at a Time*

Inside Jimbo's Head™

Series 1, Cultural Christianity Versus Kingdom
Christianity

Episode 2, What Is Cultural Christianity? Part 1,
Hey Jimbo, What is Culture, Anyway?©

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Hey Jimbo, What is Culture, Anyway?

Introduction

Ok! Enough with the announcements. Let's get down to the business of turning our lives inside out and upside down. And by that, I mean my life as well as your life. I'm on this journey right alongside you.

Now you will remember that on the last episode of Inside Jimbo's Head, we took a serious look at the condition of the modern American church with an emphasis on Evangelicalism. I hope that shook you in the same way it shook me as I began to understand these realities. However, many leaders who have heard these facts, as I said before, keep doing the same things expecting a different result. Now, even though we can't attribute the idea that "that is the definition of insanity" to Einstein, it does not take a theoretical physicist to understand that the insanity caused by those actions in the modern American Church is why things have only progressively gone downhill.

The most disturbing part to me is how many leaders attribute the downward spiral of modern Western American Christianity to the idea that the people to whom they minister are not being

receptive enough or serious enough about the gospel they preach. Time and time again, they attribute the problem to “the people not being theologically deep enough to understand the fullness of the gospel.” When researching these things, I saw over and over again how modern Western leaders always attribute our problems to incorrect doctrine or insufficient doctrinal understanding. “If just they paid attention to our preaching and teaching.” As you will see in future podcasts, the fact that preaching and teaching have become exclusively synonymous with ministry is one of the reasons for the loss of effectiveness in the church with both Christians and non-Christians alike. If correct doctrine and theological understanding were the key answer, leaders, who are steeped in doctrine and theological understanding, should be living lives in conformity to the life of Jesus. You and I both know, as do honest leaders, they do not excel in this any more than many of the people in the pews. So what do they do? They double down on teaching and preaching and come up with excuses for why Christians will never live in conformity to Jesus and keep the commands and teachings of Jesus and His early disciples in this age. You know, not until Jesus returns.

However, I am not picking on Church leaders. In reality, many people in the church point their fingers at the leadership for the problem in the modern church rather than looking deep into their own lives. Truthfully, many of the so-called “average Christians,” especially in what has been labeled the “seeker-friendly” churches, have little if any understanding of the teachings of Jesus and His early followers. Often when talking about the commands of Jesus in the New Covenant, such people ask, “What commands. Those were in the Old Covenant, not the new one. We are under grace, not the law.” If they do acknowledge the commands of the New Covenant, they dismiss them with a quick, “Well, I try my best, but at least I know I’m going to heaven.”

So here we sit, pointing fingers at each other, playing the blame game while the Titanic sinks. Now you may ask, “But Jim, what can I do about it.” You may be asking that question if you are in leadership or sitting in the pew. Oh, and by the way. The idea of sitting in the pew is a big part of the problem as well. But we will wrestle that alligator another day. By now, you should know my answer to the problem. Remember this, “The Radical Redirection of Relational Realities Required for the Revitalization of Contemporary Christianity, Its Citizens, and Communities—One Person at a Time!”

Sound Effect: Hershimer and Friends Booing

See, I told you they like to boo me, and they do it louder than they cheer. Once again, they do that every time they think I’m getting too intellectual. Oh well. Let’s get back on track.

Now, we have previously talked about this purpose statement for these podcasts and DLD University. I believe the answer is a redirection of our relationships. But not just any redirection but a radical redirection of them, which brings about a radically new lifestyle for the average modern American Christian. The radical redirection I speak of is first and foremost all about our verticle relationship with Father, His Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. But it also goes for the kind

of relationship a radical relationship with Them works between us Christians and also those not in Christ.

Yet before we get to a more stable understanding of the solution, we must first look at two key concepts. One deals with the problem and the other the solution—Cultural Christianity, which causes the problem, and Kingdom Christianity, which brings the solution into focus. Today we will take a general look at what constitutes Cultural Christianity, and then, if we get done with it, on the next episode, we will take a general look at what constitutes Kingdom Christianity. After one other episode where I will try to bring these two concepts together in a way that helps us understand how we are to relate to our native culture, we will begin to break down specific differences between Cultural Christianity and Kingdom Christianity.

1. What do we mean by Culture

Let's put on our waders and walk a little deeper into the water. To understand cultural Christianity, we must first look at the meaning of the word "culture." There seem to be as many definitions of the word "culture" as there are anthropologists, social historians, and theologians. Here is a couple I have come to use to bring about some clarity.

Anthropologist, E. Adamson Hoebel defines culture in this way. "Culture is the integrated system of learned behavior patterns which are characteristic of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance."ⁱ

In an interview with Live Science, anthropologist Cristina De Rossi added these remarks for our understanding of culture. "Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones, and a million other things."ⁱⁱ She also goes on in that article and shows how the word culture comes from the concept of cultivation. Thus a society's culture is how people grow together and bring up the next generation.

With all that said, I have come to think of culture as that big comfortable chair you like to sit in because, in that chair, you feel comfortable, safe, and at peace. That chair becomes your spot. You claim it as Sheldon, from the Big Bang Theory, claimed the one end of the couch as "his," and no one dares even touch that spot, let alone sit on the cushion. This understanding helps us understand why people go through culture shock if they move from one culture into another. It also helps us understand why immigrants often live in enclaves and continue to practice their native cultural heritage. It also tells us why Christians cling so tightly to their native cultural ways when they become members of the Kingdom culture. But more on that in a few episodes.

2. Understanding American Culture

So now, let's begin to look at the American Culture, for this is the native culture for most of us listening to this podcast. The one given aspect of culture is that culture always changes. There may be some aspects that remain constant, but the overall direction and especially the way people perceive things often change. This is true of the American culture at this time in history. In fact, at this time in history, America has already moved in its underlying values from its

foundational Modern Culture to a Post-Modern Culture. Because the present-day church has been morphed by the modernistic American culture and the concept of universal truth is common to both Biblical Christianity and the Modernistic thinking but not post-modern thinking, this change is sending many conservative Christians, especially Evangelical Christians over the edge.

In Modern culture, which finds its roots in the enlightenment age, human reason, and science reign supreme. Reason is seen as transcendent over any human history or culture and is considered universal in its scope. Modern American culture is based on the premise that human society and human freedom are intrinsically linked. The strongest of all modernistic premises is that reason will lead to universal truths that all cultures will or at least should embrace. In fact, universal truth exists independent of human consciousness, according to modernistic thinkers. Walking right alongside that premise is the premise that reason, along with its child science, can help us overcome all conflicts—not just some, but all! Thus it is reason that moves toward a progressive movement ushering in a civilized society of democracy, freedom, and scientific advancement.

Now, it does not take the great mind of the greatest philosopher to understand that these concepts were the basis for forming the nation of America and quickly became the foundation of its culture. Now there have been many nuanced changes within the history of the American culture, and cultural behaviors differ from region to region. However, modernistic thinking was not just the common view of our Founding Fathers but has remained deeply ingrained in the psyche of the American cultural reality until the great cultural shift which came to a head in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Ok, ok, I can hear it happening right now. I can see the steam coming up from some people's collars, and I can almost see your head begin to spin. I know that doesn't ring true to many of you. Modernistic culture and the enlightenment age as the basis of the founding of America? I know you think it was the Bible, and to some extent, it was. But the basic way our key founding fathers thought was based on modernistic concepts. We will get into that, a little bit more, a little later on. But hold on. We have to talk about a few more things about cultural Christianity before I end this episode.

Since we are looking at culturalized Christianity from an American perspective with an emphasis on Evangelicalism, not liberalism, we will not discuss the post-modern thought in this podcast. Why? As I stated recently, modernistic perspectives have influenced and, in many ways, given birth to our culturalized Christianity. Evangelical Christianity holds few of the values of Modernistic thinking, but we will soon see just how deeply it has impacted the way Evangelicals (as well as others) deal with both scripture and the church. Of course, in future episodes, we will look at each of these areas, along with others, in a more detailed way.

Many perspectives make up American culture. As I researched this subject over the years, I have found that many confuse values and thought patterns with beliefs and behaviors. This is why in lists of what constitutes the American culture, you find a hodgepodge of seemingly disconnected ideas. However, at the top of almost every list is a key-value, which I now consider

the loom that sets the pattern of thought for most of what Americans believe and the consequential behaviors coming from those beliefs. By the way, those consequences of this American cultural value has been very beneficial for most Americans. However, it has been devastating for American Christianity, including Evangelicalism. This value, this thought pattern, is the concept of individualism with self-reliance and self-sufficiency serving as the main appendages growing out of its core. In the course on Cultural Christianity Versus Kingdom Christianity at DLD Univerisity, we will take a deeper look at individualism and other values of American culture and how they impact American Christianity.

3. Review

But for now, let's just take a big deep breath and review what I have already said in this episode before we move forward. I know this episode may have sounded a little deep, but I think this review will help bring everything into perspective.

First, from the last episode, I reminded you of the very dangerous state in which the church, including Evangelicalism, finds its self. I also reminded you that both people in leadership and the average Christian either ignore these facts or make excuses for them without searching for their cause and the solutions to this downward trajectory of the church. We just keep doin' the same old same old as things move progressively into a more dire situation. Alarmingly we often blame these things on the sin-filled human condition as a cheap substitute for making uncomfortable changes, Biblical changes, called for by Jesus and His early followers.

After that, I reminded you of what I consider the answer—the radical redirection of our relationships with both God and each other, leading to a new radical spiritual and practical lifestyle for the average American Christian.

I then pointed out that cultural Christianity is the problem, and kingdom Christianity brings the solution into focus.

The next few steps in which I took us, dealt with defining the concept of culture. First, I gave you two strong definitions, one from Hoebe and another from Di Rossi. In the Hoebe definition, you need to focus on the fact that culture is a system of learned behavior patterns. The system is not a biologically inherited system, but one developed and passed down by people to people. In Di Rossi's definition, we discovered that culture is made up of a large number of behavior patterns and forms the traditions used to cultivate how people interact with each other, thus cultivating the same behavior patterns in the next generation. Then I shared with you a simplified way to look at culture. I see it as that big comfortable chair. You know, that chair where you sit and feel comfortable safe and at peace. By using that analogy, I hoped it would help you understand why people go through culture shock when moving into a new culture, why immigrants gather in enclaves, and why people have a hard time transitioning from their native culture into the culture of the kingdom of God if not focused on the spiritual realities of that kingdom and entering it through repentance.

Next, we look at how culture always changes and how the American culture is in the traumatic time of having its foundational cultural way of thinking transformed into another way of thinking. Our previous pattern of cultural thought has been with us since the founding of America. This new cultural foundation is the complete opposite of the first and is beginning to develop new cultural, behavioral patterns in lifestyle, politics, and even religion. This has led to the same culture shock for many conservatives, both religious and political, as a person moving from one distinct culture into another. We fight not to be knocked out of our comfortable, safe, peaceful chair.

I then pointed out how America's basic cultural way of thinking, which was established at its founding, was part of what historians have labeled the modern era. This modern era's way of thinking found its birth long before the founding of America in what historians call the age of reason, which was also known as the age of enlightenment.

We then looked at these basic building blocks of modernistic thinking.

1. Human reason and its son science reign supreme.
2. The ability to reason is universal with all humans.
3. Reason will lead to universal truths, which all men will, or at least should, accept.
4. Reason and science are what bring about an ultimate civilized society by answering all questions and solving all conflicts.
5. A society based on human reason will be a society based on democracy, freedom, and scientific advancement.

Finally, I pointed out how both the modern era of reason and Christianity have one key point in common. They both hold to the concept of universal truth and that that universal truth can be discovered by mankind. This is one key reason why American Christianity has been so quick to adapt itself to the American culture.

Oh, yes. I made one more point. Here is where many of you may have turned off the podcast thinking of me as some liberally minded crazy. I hope you didn't do that, for I am more conservative in my understanding of Christianity than many, and all these things will come together in the next and subsequent episodes of the Hello, Jimbo Speaking podcast. However, I am convinced that the foundation of the founding of America was based on the concepts of reason coming from the age of enlightenment. I made my comment on this knowing very well that the thought of humanistic reason being the basis of America's founding and culture will raise the ire of many American Christians who believe it was the Bible and God who were the founding elements of American thought and culture.

But hang in there with me. This is not some wild-eyed crazy idea that will destroy your life in Christ. In fact, it may be just the thing you need to get on track with all that the Bible teaches should be happening in your life if you are in Christ.

Ok, speaking of hanging in there with me, we have covered a lot of ground, and I am reminded of an old saying an elder in one of my churches I pastored liked to tell me. The mind and the heart can only comprehend what the seat can tolerate. In this case, it might be more applicable if that was changed to what the ears can tolerate listening to. So I think I'm going to call it the end of this episode of Inside Jimbo's Head. I told you it was a scary place but also a place where I hope you will consider my thoughts. We will continue with this in the next episode. There we will begin to look at some key unique elements of American culture which have grown out of this age of reason foundation and clashes with God's kingdom culture. Then, as I said earlier, we will take a look at Kingdom Christianity, how we as Christians should interact with our native culture, and then finalizing this series with several episodes that look at specific differences between the American cultural Christianity and kingdom Christianity.

So, until the next episode, I want to spend some time thinking about the issues we've discussed. Let them roll around in your head or as one very secular professor I once had said, "Put them in your pipe and smoke on them for a while." And be sure to come back tomorrow when I release one more launch week episode. As I always say, "Remember, as you live your life in Jesus, go out there and by God's grace make it a great day that brings honor and glory to Him."

ⁱ E. Admson Hoebel, *Anthropology: The Study of Man*, 3d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966). pg. 5

ⁱⁱ Kim Ann Zimmermann, *What is Culture?*, Live Science, July 12, 2017; <https://www.livescience.com/21478-what-is-culture-definition-of-culture.html>