



"The charm of history and its enigmatic lesson consist in the fact that, from age to age, nothing changes and yet everything is completely different."
—Aldous Huxley

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Contemporary Primitivism

Our age is more technologically advanced than any that man has previously known. The past generation alone has shown amazing development. For example, the Internet has grown from an exclusive, text-based research tool to a common household commodity. Our technologies, beneficial in many ways, provide easier means to live comfortably. But is technology a true measure of a culture's progress? Simply, no. Technology merely indicates material development, whitewashing over a culture's moral, ethical, or spiritual state with shiny displays and distractions.

What, then, is a true and accurate measure of a culture's progress? Religion. Religion shapes a culture in a way that technology simply cannot. It fashions a man's character, forming his sense of right and wrong, his reasoning, his sensibilities, and his priorities. In short, by determining a man's religion—that is, what he has devoted himself to—one can know what makes him who he *really* is (see [Matthew 6:19-24](#)). Religion teaches people how to act for good or ill, while technology merely serves as a neutral means for his actions

to be accomplished. If religion indicates a culture's true progress, then the true religion revealed in God's Word is the gold standard all cultures can be measured against.

If we were to measure today's "progress," where would it rank? Not too far from the nadir! Compared to God's standard, we live in a culturally *primitive* society. The great irony of our age is that the secular world touts the last two centuries as a cultural Golden Age. Academics hail as positive, revolutionizing forces the cultural theories of relativism, postmodernism, multiculturalism, and other similar ideologies. Political theory, paralleling these cultural isms, is becoming increasingly socialist, hurtling us toward worldwide collectivism. As a result, no part of our culture has been left untouched by these "progressive" movements.

The irony is in the very word "progressive," suggesting movement *away* from something and *toward* something else—and most progressives always assume that whatever they have chosen to head toward is the only worthy goal. Yet, progressives are moving *away* from [God](#) toward post-Christian societies, and several European countries have already arrived at their destination. A more accurate and fitting term for this body of progressive theories would be "regressivism"; our societies have *regressed* into primitive cultures with fancy technologies.

Describing our culture as "primitive" is not completely metaphoric. If we remove the theories driving progressivism from their chronological context, they look *a whole lot* like primitive cultures, such as the pre-Classical Greeks, the Assyrians, Canaanites, and any other group found in Genesis 10. All of these primitive cultures developed out of the Babylonian system (Genesis 11). An important feature of all primitive cultures is that religion forms the base of all of its practices, from governmental to recreational. However, their religions are called "primitive" for a reason. Examining any of these primitive societies would make the point, but we will consider pre-Classical Greece, from 2000 BC to about 600 BC.

Ancient Greek religion had a pantheon of gods, all of which were completely independent and sovereign from one another; a universally acknowledged hierarchy developed only late in ancient Greece. Each Greek city held one god as its *patron* god, whom the people worshipped and thought of as their

protector and benefactor. Gods became patrons in a rather simple way: Generally, whatever served as a city's livelihood would be turned into an object of worship, and in time it was abstracted into a god or goddess. In other words, each city worshipped as its god whatever kept the citizens alive, making ancient Greek religion, like most primitive religions, localized and provincial. Over time, elaborate rites and even highly formalized cults would be formed to worship these gods.

Three fundamental errors appear in this system. First, and most obvious, is that they simply did not worship the true God. Secondly, their object of worship was merely that—an object! They worshipped corn or wheat or in some cases, good old H₂O! To the contrary, God is the creator of the creations these religions worshipped. Thirdly, these primitive religions are self-centered, developing out of self-interest. By deifying and devoting their lives to what kept *them* alive, they created laws and forms of worship that revolved around the self. Concern for others was foreign to this system of belief.

Sound familiar? The three fundamental errors of primitive religions are still present and becoming more prominent the more "progressive" (read: regressive) our world becomes. The first is obvious: Our cultures still do not acknowledge God for who He is. The second error can be seen in how the secular world has elevated science to a religious level. Though no secularist would admit it, science *is* the religion of progressive culture, putting [faith](#) in men like Darwin just as Catholics do in the "church fathers."

Finally, the self-centeredness of our primitive culture is a direct result of relativism. Like the Greek pantheon of independent, sovereign gods, relativism does away with any notion of a hierarchy of truth or value—it asserts that no religion contains more truth or is more valuable than any other. What is the result? No individual or group feels any kind of loyalty or submission to anything greater than its own understanding. When the author of Judges writes, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" ([Judges 21:25](#)), he might as well be describing the self-absorbed Western world of 2008.

Contrary to modern opinion, God's way of life is the apex of civilization, and His Kingdom will be the only *true* progressive force on earth. However, it is not only a future occurrence, replacing the carnal primitive culture of [the world](#) at Christ's return, but every called son and daughter is given the opportunity to be a part of it *now*. [Jesus](#) says in [Matthew 13:11](#), "[I]t has been give to you to know the mysteries of the [kingdom of heaven](#), but to them it has not been given." In [Philippians 3:20](#), Paul states plainly that "our citizenship is in heaven."

God has given His called-out ones the opportunity to live a life that is best suited to humans, one that provides every need and cultivates every potential. To live according to His way is the pinnacle of human experience and a tremendous blessing. While being thankful for this, we must beware of the primitive culture around us, notwithstanding its "advanced" appearance. In striving to make God's way of life our own, we will be prepared to serve Him in replacing the world's primitive systems with God's.

- Staff

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The World \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

God has set a pattern of separating people from the world, making a covenant with them, and enabling them to be a blessing to others as an example of faithfulness and obedience to the covenant. Because of Israel's unfaithfulness and disobedience, God scattered them among the nations, causing them to forget who they were, and they blended in with the world. Like Nehemiah, our worldview must be shaped by a fear of God, a love and concern for His people, and a hatred for the world's practices that destroy our intimate relationship with God. We have the sobering responsibility of staying loyal to the New Covenant, keeping the spiritual Temple free from the world's defilement — or lose our spiritual identity as ancient Israel lost its physical identity.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Are You Living the Abundant Life?](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Non-Christians tend to see Christianity as an utterly boring, rigid way of life. However, Jesus Christ Himself says He came to give His disciples abundant life (John 10:10). Richard Ritenbaugh reveals the big 'secret' in living the abundant life.

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